



MPA member spotlight: Joe Sowerby

By Jeanne Towar

Joe Sowerby is a successful business executive, an author, a marathon runner, a former professional boxing referee, a motivational speaker and a community leader, but his first love is making a difference in the lives of thousands of homeless dogs and cats.

Sowerby, president of Anton, Sowerby & Associates, a professional real estate brokerage headquartered in Mt. Clemens, is better known as the founder of the largest adoption events in the United States – Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo and Pet-A-Palooza.



Sowerby has shared his home with pets his whole life. In 1992, he lost a beloved cat in an accident.

“At about the same time, I read an article about new Detroit Zoo CEO Ron Kagan, who hated the idea of killing animals as much as I did,” Sowerby said. “A light came on and I thought, ‘what better place to adopt animals from than the zoo?’ I cold called Director Kagan and we came up with the idea of having an adoption event in the zoo parking lot.”

“I recruited the Michigan Humane Society (MHS) as the adoption partner and, with a lot of my time and spiritual support, the first Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo took place in 1993,” Sowerby continued. “In just one afternoon, we found homes for 113 dogs and cats. MHS had never adopted out 113 animals in a week, much less (in) a day.”

Nobody imagined such a stunning success. Sowerby wanted to build on that success and reached out to other animal welfare organizations. Within five years, Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo grew from one animal rescue organization to 25, and from adopting out 113 animals to 500 to 600. Although Sowerby is no longer directly involved, Meet Your Best Friend at the Zoo semiannual events continue to find homes for some 800 companion animals in need of forever homes.

For another 10 years, Sowerby helped homeless dogs and cats get adopted by founding his second pet adoption event, Pet-A-Palooza; first at Freedom Hill in Sterling Heights, also Heritage Park in Taylor, then at the Palace of Auburn Hills. During this time, he and his wife Kata had a second home in Sedona, Arizona, where he brought Pet-A-Palooza to northern Arizona. With the help of local shelters and media, Sowerby found homes for hundreds of homeless pets out west.

He estimates that more than 40,000 pets were saved over those 20 years. He laughingly says he is an anonymous godfather to thousands of four-legged children. Jeff Payne, local news editor of The Macomb Daily and Royal Oak Tribune newspapers, said: “Having the wary mindset of a journalist, one of the first questions I had for Joe was, ‘what’s in it for you?’”

“It became clear after my first conversation with Joe that there was no monetary gain. Instead, what he got out of the event over the years was enrichment of his soul. These animals were his passion, and I suspect, if given the choice of closing a million-dollar deal or saving some homeless animals, Joe would have chosen the latter.”

“Joe Sowerby is a pioneer animal welfare advocate,” said Michigan Pet Alliance (MPA) Chair Deborah Schutt. “He realized that you can’t save them unless you can get them into peoples’ homes. He came along at a very critical time and spent his own time, talents and finances to fill a critical role.

“MPA appreciates him stepping up to enroll Anton, Sowerby & Associates as the first corporate member of the Michigan Pet Alliance.”

“Life’s best deals aren’t always for money,” Sowerby said. “I’ve been paid in a different currency.”

Michigan Pet Alliance membership is open to individuals, animal shelters, rescues, other non-profits, businesses and corporations who share MPA’s vision of working together to achieve the best quality of life for Michigan’s companion animals. Go online to michiganpet.org to join.

Feral cat assistance ... you can be the one for change

By Jenny German
TNR Advocate



Just after turning 40, the idea of helping feral cats was something I had never entertained as I truly did not know much about these felines, nor had I ever heard of the acronym TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return).

That all changed in 2003 when I learned of a large colony of cats in my community and how out of control the situation was getting. Being an animal lover, I decided to check out the area in person and from that day forward, my life changed forever. When I saw over 50

hungry cats/kittens scattered across a wooded area and field with intact males, kittens, and starving pregnant females hiding behind trees and tall grass, a new passion was created ... the desire to improve the lives of feral cats. The real challenge began as I had no idea just how to do this, but the vision in my head of these cats needing assistance was the driving force that gave me the courage to start a new chapter in my life. I promised them their lives were going to change for the better starting that day.

Times were different 19 years ago. TNR was not the movement that it is today, so most of my feral education came from scarce internet articles and observing and interacting with ferals in person. My daily caretaker duties began with the colony and this meant feeding/watering, sheltering, and figuring out how to get them trapped for spay/neuter purposes. I began having yard sales and the pocketed money went into an account for their surgeries. At first, finding a veterinarian was no easy task since many were not equipped to handle these specific cats for fear of liability. When I found a low-cost clinic in Battle Creek that was knowledgeable and had the expertise to fix feral cats, I then accelerated the spay/neuter surgeries.

Since I did not own any live traps, I heard our city had a loaner one so I went to check it out in person. When the official placed the trap on the desk, rust flakes by the dozen fell off the trap, so I kindly declined and purchased some traps myself. The night before my first trapping experience, I think I slept perhaps 20 minutes. I was excited, yet a bit nervous. With each trapping experience, I gained more confidence and soon enough, I was on my way to stopping their reproduction. It was exhilarating to see the lives of the

ferals greatly improved with each and every spay/neuter. These cats were happier, healthier, coexisted more peacefully and their numbers were becoming stabilized. To see a fixed feral cat do a half-somersault with joy because the caretaker was on the path to the feeding station is a vision I will treasure for the rest of my life. I wondered how many others experienced this bond and feelings of fulfillment. The rewards of what I was witnessing each day were phenomenal.

Trap-Neuter-Return was really not familiar terminology in the United States until the 1990s. As a society, we have come a long way since then, but we still have a great deal of work to do. Millions of feral cats are in need of spay/neuter assistance. These cats are in this predicament through no fault of their own. I now practice TNR on a regular basis in my community in order to help other felines. TNR is the most humane and effective means of reducing the feral cat population and makes for a kinder, more compassionate community.

Across our nation, we currently have veterinarians and low-cost spay/neuter clinics fixing feral cats on a routine basis. There now exists better traps, tools/dividers, sheltering ideas, workshops, and tips on how to help ferals, also known as community cats. For that person wanting to get involved, but who is slightly apprehensive, please reach out for help by calling clinics or searching for TNR volunteers who you can shadow or use as a reference. Every community cat who is spayed/neutered is a victory. Nineteen years later, I still oversee my colony due to occasional drop-offs. The numbers have greatly decreased over these years, but the passion is still there. One person can make positive changes in the lives of community cats ... will you be that next individual?

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What: "Scent 4 Shelter Dogs"

When: April 19, 2022 6 - 7 p.m. Eastern

Why: Celebrate Pet Owners Day with an introduction to scentwork. Whether you are a small rural shelter, a foster-based rescue, or a large open-admission municipal shelter, you can easily establish a scent enrichment program that will transform the lives of the dogs in your care. Nosework can help reduce anxiety, calm overstimulated dogs, burn energy in hyperactive dogs, and build confidence in shy and fearful dogs. And it's not just for dogs ... all companion animals can benefit from scentwork. Small budget, large budget, no budget? You can do this!

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- Member Fee: \$0 (when registered with MPA account email)
- Non-Member Fee: \$25
- No refunds. Exchanges allowed.

Where: Live on Zoom. Can't attend? Register anyway and we will send you a link to the recording.

[Register](#)

About our Expert

Laurie Horn is a dog trainer and owner of Sniffing Out Solutions. She began Sniffing Out Solutions to offer free resources to dog owners, rescues, and shelters. She also works with individuals virtually or in-person to create a better bond with your dog through play, enrichment, and scentwork. She believes in a force-free, positive reinforcement, methodology. She does not believe in using aversive training tools. She believes that while they may appear to be a quick fix to a problem, in the long run they damage the bond between the dog and their person, which can be extremely difficult to

repair. A dog is much more likely to make good choices when they are rewarded for doing so, than if they are punished for making a bad choice.

She grew up with Collies and has been lucky enough to have the love of a Dalmatian, as well as two amazing wonderful mutts and numerous other dogs during her time in rescue and shelter work. She worked in rescue for several years, including serving on the board of a bully breed rescue. She was instrumental, as the adoption counselor, in finding homes for the misunderstood and the forgotten ones.

She is a member of the Council for Certified Professional Dog Trainers. She has her CPDT-KA, is Certified Fear Free, a Certified Concept Pro Dog Trainer (CCPDT-AD), and a Blue Level World Scent Dog Association (WSDA) Instructor and Level 1 Judge.

Laurie is the author of "Scent 4 Shelter Dogs" available on Amazon.

Laurie lives in Michigan with her husband and spends her time writing, continuing her education in scentwork and dog behavior, and making enrichment items that she donates to local shelters and rescues.

About Michigan Pet Alliance

MPA Vision:

To achieve the best quality of life for Michigan's companion animals.

MPA Mission:

To work in collaboration and speak with a single voice to eliminate abuse and neglect of Michigan's companion animals and to save all healthy and treatable homeless companion animals through training, technical assistance, education, and advocacy.

For more information:
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