

HUMANE REVIEW

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The Newsletter of the New York State Humane Association



A Tribute to Holly Cheever, DVM

Many times in life, we are asked to reflect on someone who has had a great influence on us. At NYSHA, we are fortunate to have had someone who not only had an immeasurable effect on each of us individually, but on our organization, her friends and family, her community, but especially as a voice for animals and their importance and value in the world.

We lost our long-time Vice President, Holly Cheever, DVM, on February 9. What an incredible person she was in every way. We will miss her presence on the Earth. She was so important and valuable -- to us, to the countless animals she helped, to each of her clients, to all the people she educated at our workshops. We have all lost something and someone truly precious.

She was a colleague, friend, advisor, spouse, mother, grandmother, mentor, teacher and throughout her life, one of the fiercest animal protection advocates in history. She served on boards all over the country, as a consultant for numerous animal protection organizations, and testified before Congress and other government entities on behalf of the creatures she loved so dearly...

circus animals, elephants in captivity, force-fed geese for foie gras, carriage horses, farm animals, declawed cats. If there was an animal or a species who needed protection, Holly made it her mission to do something — and the something she did changed and improved the lives of countless animals not only in this country, but around the world. Yet individually, she was a mom and a beloved and respected vet with a full-time practice, always on call to help, while running her personal sanctuary on her farm in



Dr. Holly Cheever

Voorheesville.

Besides presenting at NYSHA'S workshops, evaluating and treating animals on-site at numerous cruelty cases, she was a dependable presence at organized protests against horse racing, circus animals, and other causes dear to her and to NYSHA. She was a regular advocate with us in the government offices in Albany fighting for the vital legislation she so eloquently explained and promoted.

As well as she spoke, Holly was also a wonderful writer. In our newsletter, she wrote our veterinarian column for many years, and during her storied career, she also contributed a monthly column to *Good Housekeeping* magazine. Since she regularly testified in cruelty cases, she joked that she could say she had the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval!

We could always count on her to write cogent letters to the editor and legislative memos from both a humane and veterinary point of view. \

We would need a book to recognize Dr. Holly and then the story would still not be complete. From her early days as a horse riding

vet in the back roads of Kentucky to her last days still advocating for respect and humane treatment of all animals, she never stopped caring. Her accomplishments with and for NYSHA are too numerous to list, and included humane education, advocating for outlawing cat declawing as well as for better veterinary reporting of animal abuse...and the list goes on.

Holly's son, Jesse Sommer, wrote a beautiful tribute to her. We edited it substantially and recommend

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Holly, instructing attendees at NYSHA's farm animal workshop on signs of cruelty/neglect.

President's Message

The animals and all of us who care about them have lost a champion with the passing of Dr. Holly Cheever. In addition to all her other activism, she was always there to work with NYSHA on any endeavor we were involved in to promote the welfare of animals.

Though I worked on numerous cruelty cases with Holly, my main interaction with her in the NYSHA sphere, were the many workshops NYSHA conducted across the state to instruct police, humane investigators, and others on how to investigate animal cruelty. The workshops ranged from Allegany County in the western part of the state, to Clinton County in the north, to Suffolk County on Long Island, and Holly always was there as a key speaker to provide her expert instruction to the attendees about how to best address and assess a cruelty case from a veterinary perspective.

Because of the wide-ranging locations, I arranged overnight stays for the other speakers that included some lively evening dinners. Holly, however, did not choose that option, as she had numerous animals to tend to in the mornings at her farm, especially her beloved Blossom and Bridgett, two beautiful brown-eyed cows she had raised since bottle-feeding them as baby calves.

So while the rest of us were having a nice breakfast after a night's rest, Holly was driving for many hours and many hundreds of miles to be our post-lunch speaker. Remarkably, she arrived full of vigor and ready to go.

Yet, you first need to get the people to assemble and quiet down, and often while I was making a feeble attempt at that, waving my arms and saying, "Can I have your attention?" Holly took over, as she had her own unique method to get their attention. She put her fingers to her lips, blew, and let out the most ear-piercing whistle you can imagine. People stopped in their tracks stunned by the mighty blast this little lady could deliver. Thus, the afternoon session began.

As many of us know, the post-lunch speaking spot is not an easy one, but no one was seen nodding off in a reverie when Holly presented. She had a style all her own. To demonstrate how an investigator might



Holly, with officers at NYSHA workshop, always found time to give extra help.

recognize a dog with a mange problem, she would hunch over and march forward one-two-three-four, backward one-two-three-four several times and ask the attendees to imagine she was a dog scratching its back on the top of the opening of the dog house to relieve the horrid itching caused by mange and that resulted in a back rubbed red raw. It brought the point home vividly and I am sure none of the attendees ever forgot it.

Holly was a born teacher, and that coupled with her passionate dedication to use her voice for animals, anytime, anyplace, and in any way, made her an esteemed and cherished advocate who can never be replaced. Her legacy will be all the young veterinarians she inspired with her talks at veterinary conferences, the police officers she motivated to investigate animal crimes, and the thousands of people she moved emotionally--just by being Holly-- to do more to better the lives of animals. She will not be forgotten. Ever.

Please be kind to animals, Patricia Valusek

Our Voices in Albany

Key bills in Albany need your support. Please call your state representatives and urge them to co-sponsor and/or support them. Your voices make a difference!

These two will make the felony cruelty law more effective: "**Tucker's Law**" **S197/A3050**: ensures that defendants who are convicted of a felony for the most heinous crimes of animal abuse can be properly incarcerated in state prison, as are other convicted felons. **S703/A2019**: removes the word "serious" which is subject to interpretation from the felony statute, thus making it easier for prosecutors to prosecute the cases more efficiently.

S3046/A54: bans all types of glue traps, cruel tormenting devices that force mice and small critters to suffer a prolonged and horrible death.

S4613/A5815: extends Orders of Protection to animals who end up being pawns in acrimonious domestic disputes.

S1784/A5505: requires property owners to inspect vacated property within three days for abandoned animals.

Two deal with wild animals. **S1182/A667**: bans painful leg-hold traps and **S562/A859**: bans using non-native animals, such as tigers, for example, from being used in canned hunts.

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Should 10-Year-Olds Hunt?

A new bill has been introduced in the State which would allow children as young as 10 to hunt wildlife with a rifle, bow, or crossbow, as long as they are accompanied by and within “arm’s length” of an experienced mentor. This is a follow-on to the bill included in the state budget in 2021 which lowered the hunting age for deer and bear to 12. In the sponsors’ justification, they point out that the number of hunters has been declining in New York and this would boost this number back up.

In the previous bill, the 12-year-olds would have to have a hunter’s license, but the new bill allows 10-year-olds to hunt without having a license or even attending a hunters’ education course. The DEC claims that all other states allow children 12 years old or younger to hunt big game, and New York should too. Ten-year old children are highly impressionable, easily indoctrinated and desensitized, so this bill should result in a whole new crop of hunters, so the DEC hopes.

In New York, there is a 10-year average of 14 firearm hunting accidents with 1-3 fatalities annually. While the number of accidents and fatalities of hunters has decreased in recent years, attributed to hunter education courses, the 10-year-olds aren’t required to attend such courses, and their inexperience and weaker stature holding heavy rifles or crossbows are likely to result in accidents and fatalities to humans at some day in the future. They are also likely to result

in wounding the animals rather than outright killing, resulting in a prolonged, painful, lingering death.

What is conveniently overlooked by the DEC and the bill’s sponsors is the “collateral damage,” the deer-car collisions. Most such collisions occur during peak hunting season as deer flee in fear across roads. In New York, there were over 35,000 such collisions with 1,500 injuries and 9 fatalities in 2023, and many millions of dollars lost in damages. Increasing the number of hunters by adding 10-year-old children can only increase this problem.

Between danger to hikers and birdwatchers walking innocently through the woods, increased danger of deer-collisions, the inevitable hunting accidents, and the additional cruelty to wildlife that are only wounded, growing the number of hunters by adding mentally and emotionally immature 10-year-olds to the mix of lethal firearm-wielding individuals seems contrary to social responsibility.

What you can do: Contact your local state senator and representative, let them know you strongly oppose Bill S1153/A2312 which would lower the hunting age to 10 years of age and urge them to vote against it. Ask the Governor not to add it to the Budget. Go to pluralpolicy.com/open/ to find the Governor’s and your legislators’ contact information.

The World Around Us – Bees, the Great Pollinators

Did you know that NYS is home to more than 450 species of bees? The most common wild bee in NY is the digger bee, which represents more than 54% all of NY’s native bees. Digger bees, sometimes called miner bees, are part of the Apidae family which includes honey bees, bumble bees, and carpenter bees. Unlike the honey bee and bumble bee, digger bees live independent and solitary lives, leaving the female digger bee to construct her own nest.

While many native bees choose to nest in brush piles and hollow stems of woody plants, digger bees prefer to build their nests in loose sandy or loamy soil. They are excellent diggers, building nests in the ground that appear as small mounds or holes with an entrance and exit. The female lines the nest with an oral polyester-like secretion which will protect her eggs. After the female lays her eggs in the nest, the eggs will go through a complete metamorphosis and emerge as adults the following year.

Digger bees are a delight to gardeners. They are one of the most efficient pollinators in the ecosystem, pollinating a wide variety of flowering plants and having a wide range of foraging. They are a necessity to the reproduction of many native plants as well as gardens and crops. Digger bees are not aggressive and only the female is able to sting when provoked. Some homeowners, however, find the digger bee nests to be unsightly as they can interfere with turf growth. To discourage the digger bees from nesting in a particular area, simply water the area to keep the ground moist. The digger bee prefers dry areas and will move away.



Photo: Aaron Burden – Unsplash

Bees are important pollinators.

In 2022, Cornell cited that more than 60% of NY’s bees are at risk of survival. If you want to discourage bees from your yard, find natural means. Determine and remove what is attracting them – flowering plants, bird baths, hummingbird feeders, standing water, anything that smells sweet. Keep yard clear of debris and brush piles. Use plants with strong and potent smells – marigolds, garlic, lemongrass, thyme, etc. Enlist a bee removal expert to remove any nests and relocate it. Avoid using pesticides, herbicides, and neonicotinoids. In 2024 Governor Hochul signed the Birds and Bees Protection Act which bans the use of neonicotinoid-treated corn, soybeans and wheat seeds, ornamental plants and turf in New York. The ban won’t take effect until January 1, 2029.

For those who want to encourage digger bees and other native bees to their environment here are some bee-friendly suggestions: plant a variety of native plants in your garden or on your patio; bees love bee balm, clover, and yarrow. Although dandelions are not a preferred food but fill a gap when other sources are not available, you might delay mowing a while in the spring. Keep a small basin of water amongst the plants with small stones placed inside so the bees won’t drown, lessen the size of your lawn, allow some part of your yard to be unkempt, and learn to love weeds.

The Bee Conservancy, New York Bee Sanctuary, New York City Bee Keepers Association, NY Bee Wellness, and Cornell University are just a few of the organizations that provide resources for education and protection of bees in NYS.

reading it on our website. Her courageous journey to become a warrior to provide rights for and enhance the welfare of our fellow non-human beings is inspiring and motivates us all to follow in her path. A portion of his enlightening obituary follows:

“Mary Helen “Holly” Cheever arrived on January 22, 1950, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She was raised Unitarian amidst a close-knit community of cousins who trace their American roots back to Ezekial Cheever’s arrival to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s. Holly attended high school at Milton Academy in Massachusetts, where she was Captain of the girl’s field hockey team. She studied anthropology and Greek folklore mythology at Harvard University, from which she graduated summa cum laude in 1972. Eight years later, Holly graduated #1 in her class from the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine and began her practice as a large animal (dairy) veterinarian.

“As a result of Holly’s interfaith marriage, the family observed both Christian and Jewish traditions, yet its core moral ethos was and always will be vegetarianism. Her most fervent and desperate hope for humanity is that it ends the cultivation and consumption of sentient life, as Holly viewed all sentient lifeforms as being her equal and in need of human guardianship. In a story she relayed to Altamont Enterprise columnist Dennis Sullivan in 2015 about a cow she’d encountered years earlier: ‘There is a lot more going on behind those beautiful eyes than we humans have ever given [animals] credit for, and, as a mother who was able to nurse all four of my babies and did not have to suffer the agonies of losing my beloved offspring, I feel her pain.’

“It was in caring for the community’s pet population that she became ingratiated to the entire Capital District. Holly’s family was stunned by the thousands of comments on social media expressing their condolences and sharing tearful anecdotes about the magnitude of her compassion for the four-legged members of their families. Dr. Holly occupied a lofty posture in town, having been welcomed into the homes of those who would turn to her to treat, save, and rehabilitate the family dog or the squirrel found injured on the side of the road. She was most praised for the genuine empathy and commiseration she displayed in the end-of-life care she afforded families which were compelled to say goodbye to their old and suffering animal companions.

“Holly was an avid reader, brilliant writer, and a ferociously talented public speaker. She was a polyglot, musician, artist, athlete, seamstress, choir singer, horseback rider, sailor, gardener, and baker and named “Mother of the Year” by the City of Albany in 2021. As



Dr. Holly, a favorite with clients and their pets.



Holly, with a beloved cow, on her small farm animal sanctuary.

she said at the ceremony “I feel very humbled and very delighted. I care a lot about animal rights and animal welfare. I think a vote for me is perhaps a vote for the entire planet of animals that we share this world with.

“In the words of her dear friend and business partner, fellow Village Animal Clinic veterinarian Dr. Mike McCarthy, ‘Dr. Holly was a brilliant veterinarian [and] fierce advocate for animal health and welfare. She taught in many veterinary schools across the country, instructed the New York State Police about animal abuse laws, taught veterinary forensics courses, testified in many animal abuse cases across the country and, of course, co-founded The Village Animal Clinic in Voorheesville.’

“Holly’s mission in life was to end humanity’s abuse and disregard of animals; she refused to eat anything with a central nervous system, and she dedicated her life to dozens of causes focused on alleviating animal suffering. Her work was both national (testifying before Congress) and local (introducing dozens of Voorheesville’s students to what’s really in a hot dog), and she never relented in the face of the (often enraged) critics she made uncomfortable by her uncompromising, unselfconscious, and unapologetic truth-telling.

“Dr. Holly Cheever, DVM was an unparalleled talent with an unrivaled intellect and an unmatched capacity for compassion. To the many animals who were lucky enough to find themselves in her care, she was their voice. She is missed, both because she was so loved and because her advocacy was so crucial.

“After a long battle with Parkinson’s disease. Holly passed away surrounded by her entire family on Sunday, February 9, 2025. She was 75. For those seeking to pay their respects and honor Holly’s legacy, her family has expressed the following: In lieu of flowers, don’t eat meat. In lieu of not eating meat,

always be kind to animals.” (See full obit on NYSHA website.)

We have included parts of Jesse’s obituary here because in a very personal way it touches on what made Holly such a unique and extraordinary individual, and how her values and mission in life meshed so well with NYSHA. She constantly taught and mentored us, and besides being our friend and hero, she will continue to be a role model for generations. We will miss her leadership and formidable commitment to make the world a much kinder and better place. Her accomplishments filled the years she spent with us and we are so grateful for that time.