UPDATE ON MICHAEL VICK CASE: ASPCA TO LEAD EVALUATIONS OF PIT BULLS SEIZED FROM VICK’S PROPERTY

On Monday, August 27, the U. S. Attorney’s office revealed that Dr. Melinda Merck, ASPCA Forensic Veterinarian, participated in the excavation of graves and the examination of canine remains found on Vick’s Virginia property. Now the ASPCA has a new challenge to face—leading a team of behaviorists in evaluating pit bulls taken from Vick’s property during the course of the investigation.

Dr. Stephen Zawistowski, the ASPCA’s Science Advisor and Executive Vice President, National Programs, will head up the team that will conduct the evaluations. San Francisco-based BAD RAP (Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls), a nonprofit educational resource for pit bull parents and handlers, will be working with the evaluation team to help identify which dogs are eligible for foster programs and possible rehoming into appropriate foster homes.

Other options for the rescued pit bulls may include rehabilitation as law enforcement dogs, placement in sanctuaries or, if there is no other choice, humane euthanasia. The ASPCA-led team will provide a report to the USDA; the final disposition of the dogs, however, will be decided by a federal judge. During the evaluation process, the dogs will remain in the federal government’s possession. At no time will the ASPCA take possession of them.

“We greatly appreciate the trust placed in us by the USDA to
ensure that these dogs are given every possibility for a second chance,” says Ed Sayres, ASPCA President & CEO. “We take this phase of the investigation very seriously. Fighting dogs face many challenges when considered for rehabilitation or placement, and we'll make sure they get the professional, thorough and detailed evaluations they deserve.”

For further details on the ASPCA’s role in the Michael Vick case and for important information on dog fighting, please visit the ASPCA Anti-Cruelty Resource Center.

ASPCA SUCCESS STORY OF THE WEEK: THE ROYAL TREATMENT

Nicole McMahon remembers the exact day her family adopted Sheba from her local shelter. “The woman at the front desk walked us into the back room,” Nicole recalls, “and the most beautiful cat I had ever seen stared up at me.” Nicole proceeded to give Sheba a good petting, and the kitty showed her appreciation with a special kind of purr. “It was unlike anything I had ever heard before,” says Nicole. “It sounded almost like a turkey!”

When the McMahons brought Sheba home, they learned quickly that she would need some adjustment time. “She hid in the closet for almost two weeks,” says Nicole. “And when she came out, she just spun in circles and chased her tail.” The family realized their next step was to let their newest member know that she was loved unconditionally—and thus commenced the royal treatment.

“When Sheba decided that my new down jacket would make a cozy bed, it became hers permanently, and I had to buy a new winter coat!” Nicole recalls. “And in the middle of the night, when she’d jump on the bed with a loud meow and drop her toy mouse on my face, I’d get myself up to play catch with her.” After a few months of being treated like a queen, Sheba stopped hiding in the closet and began to join the McMahons in their bed at night.

The lady of the house is now 14 years old and can still jump three feet high to catch her toy mouse. “I think part of the reason Sheba has stayed so healthy and active in her senior years is because she knows how much she’s loved,” says Nicole. “We hope to have many more years with our queen. And yes, she still does the turkey purr—when she’s really content.”

COULDN’T JOIN OUR LIVE CHAT ON PET NUTRITION? HERE’S A TASTE OF WHAT YOU MISSED

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Thank you to everyone who participated in our live chat with ASPCA nutrition experts Jennifer Wheeler, M.S., and Mindy Bough, CVT. They offered advice on the dry/wet food debate, proper diets for doggie diabetes, homemade pet food and more:

I just adopted Brandy, a one-year-old papillon/Chihuahua mix who weighs about six pounds. Brandy will not eat dry food. I even switched to a "small breed" dry food formula but nothing helps. Any suggestions?

Congratulations on the adoption of your new dog, Carol! How wonderful for both you and Brandy! I have a four-year-old Chihuahua. She is not picky, but I know that finicky eaters are not uncommon in these small breeds. From a nutritional standpoint, it is not necessary for Brandy to eat dry good. If you use a high-quality canned or pouch food, all of her nutritional requirements should be met. If you would really like Brandy to eat some dry food, too, I have a couple of suggestions...

—Mindy B.

Click here to read the rest of Mindy’s answer and view the full transcript of the discussion.

A PENNY FOR YOUR...SEARCH?

What if the ASPCA earned a penny every time you searched the Internet? Well, we do, thanks to GoodSearch.com, a search engine powered by Yahoo! that donates half of its revenues to charities. Simply visit GoodSearch.com to start making a difference and check out how the numbers add up. If 500 people search four times a day, roughly $7,300 will be raised in a year—without anyone spending a dime. So far over $4,200 has been raised for the ASPCA in 2007 alone. So be sure to visit GoodSearch.com and add your two cents (or three or four) to animal welfare!

P.S. If you can, be sure to visit on Friday, August 31—that’s today—when the ASPCA will be featured as Charity of the Day.

RINGLING BROTHERS WILL STAND TRIAL FOR ELEPHANT ABUSE

On August 23, 2007, a federal district court in Washington, D.C., issued a major ruling rejecting the last-ditch attempt of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus to avoid trial over charges that the
circus abuses its Asian elephants.

The groundbreaking lawsuit, brought by the ASPCA, the Fund for Animals, the Animal Welfare Institute, the Animal Protection Institute and Tom Rider, a former employee of Ringling Bros., alleges that the circus violates the Endangered Species Act by abusively training and disciplining elephants with sharp implements such as bullhooks, by intensively confining and chaining the animals for prolonged periods, and by forcibly separating baby elephants from their mothers.

In its ruling, the court scolded the circus for "wast[ing] a considerable amount of time and resources" of the court and the prosecuting groups by engaging in delay tactics over several years. Furthermore, the court reiterated a previous ruling that the circus has repeatedly violated a court order by withholding critical evidence.

"The ASPCA is delighted with this latest ruling, which paves the way for the real case at hand—whether Ringling Brothers violated the Endangered Species Act in its treatment of the elephants," states the ASPCA's Lisa Weisberg, Senior Vice President, Government Affairs & Public Policy. The trial schedule will be determined early next year, and the trial itself is expected to begin sometime in 2008.

For more information on the cruelty that goes on in circuses, and what you can do about it, please visit our circus cruelty section at ASPCA.org.

TEACHERS, INVITE THE ANIMAL KINGDOM INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

Want your classroom to be aflutter with young animal lovers this September? Check out the ASPCA's Humane Education section for some great ideas on how to incorporate animal themes and humane lessons into your plans. Kids love animals—and including them in a reading, writing or math activity can make the lesson more effective and double the fun. You'll find:

- Back-to-school classroom tips
- An animal-themed event calendar
- Downloadable lesson plans (in keeping with national standards)
- Children’s book list

And that's just for inside the classroom. We also offer service learning projects and links to volunteer opportunities that allow students to practice being humane citizens in the giant
classroom outside of school.