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2020 PIJAC AWARDS RECOGNIZE OUTSTANDING PET CARE COMMUNITY LEADERS

ORLANDO, Fla. – February 25, 2020 – The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) today honored six individuals and organizations for their exceptional contributions to the pet care community during a ceremony held in conjunction with the Global Pet Expo trade show at the Orange County Convention Center.

“The responsible pet care community wouldn’t have achieved the growth and impact it has today without the vision and perseverance of these remarkable individuals and organizations,” said PIJAC Board Chair Laura “Peach” Reid, president of Fish Mart in West Haven, Conn. “Recognizing them with 2020 PIJAC awards is the least we can do to express our gratitude for their work to protect and advance pet, human, and pet business safety, health and success.”

PIJAC honored Allan Levey of Secaucus, N.J., with the **Nancy G. Knutson Lifetime Achievement Award** for his pioneering 70-year career in the pet care community. Levey has led by example on countless efforts to identify, protect and promote the benefits of pet ownership to individuals and society as a whole. From humble beginnings packing bird food in 1941, he went on to become president of Wardley Products Company, to co-found both PIJAC and the American Pet Products Association (APPA, formerly the American Pet Product Manufacturers Association), and help revive the Human Animal Bond Research Initiative (HABRI).

PIJAC’s **Ambassador of the Year Award** was presented to American Humane’s National Director, Companion Animals and Government Affairs Keryn (Kerry) Rod. Rod has worked industriously over the past year to connect PIJAC with a wide range of allied organizations, resulting in new opportunities and greater visibility. She is a former co-chair of PIJAC’s government affairs committee, and year-after-year is a consistent and successful volunteer for membership recruitment efforts.

Eugene Bessette, of Ophiological Services in Archer, Fla., received PIJAC’s **Pet Advocate of the Year Award**. A herp industry pioneer for over half a century, Bessette has been a tireless advocate to lawmakers and regulators on proposals to support and grow the responsible reptile trade in Florida, and to address proposals to curtail pet ownership and the herp industry at all levels of government as part of PIJAC’s Herp Committee. Bessette was a driving force in founding USARK Florida, a grassroots advocacy group made up of local herp businesses and

stakeholders that works to develop productive relationships with officials on issues impacting the responsible herp industry in the state.

The Pet Store Pro team at the Pet Industry Distributors Association (PIDA) was honored with PIJAC's **Pet Care Community Leader of the Year award** for providing an invaluable service to the entire pet care community. PIDA launched Pet Store Pro in 2008 to provide independent retailers with consistent, reliable training resources on business basics and pet care for entry-level employees, and the team has grown the online program to 30 associate- and management-level courses—all of which are offered at no cost. The newest offering is a Zoonotic Disease Prevention training program developed in partnership with PIJAC.

The inaugural “Meet the Pets on Capitol Hill” event in November, 2019, was a huge success, and PIJAC recognized Pet Partners International with the **Power of Pets award** for the achievement. Over 600 Capitol Hill staffers and a number of Members of Congress interacted with over a dozen certified therapy dog and handler teams. Pet Partners and PIJAC took advantage of a high-profile hearing happening on the same day to secure major media coverage for the event—including the Wall Street Journal, People and The Washington Post—and reached an audience of over 100 million with the message of the power of pets.

PIJAC's Chair's Award of Excellence was presented to National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA) President Patti Strand. Since founding NAIA almost thirty years ago, Strand has tirelessly advocated for responsible breeders large and small and played integral and often leading roles in many legislative victories. She has used her deep and historical knowledge of issues facing companion animal suppliers to help the efforts of countless other pet care community organizations.

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About PIJAC

Founded in 1971, the [Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council](#) (PIJAC) serves as the legislative and regulatory voice of the responsible pet care community, working to promote animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, foster environmental stewardship, and ensure the availability of healthy pets. PIJAC members include retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, wholesale distributors, manufacturers' representatives, pet hobbyists, and other trade organizations.