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Pet Advocacy Network's Annual Awards Celebrate Devoted Pet Care Community Leaders

Honorees recognized during organization's 50th anniversary celebration event

Alexandria, Va. – March 30, 2022 – The Pet Advocacy Network, formerly known as the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC), recognized the achievements of a renowned group of pet care community professionals with seven awards presented during their 50th anniversary celebration event on March 22 in Orlando, Fla. The awards honored outstanding efforts in advocacy, communications and leadership.

“At the Pet Advocacy Network, we are proud to highlight these leaders who have made remarkable impacts on the entire pet care community,” said Pet Advocacy Network Board Chair John Mack, founder and CEO of Reptiles by Mack in Xenia, Ohio. “Their unwavering commitment to bettering the world for pets and their owners is a goal that we all aspire to.”

Marcie Whichard, Vice President of Professional & Community Relations at the North American Veterinary Community (NAVC), received the **Pet Advocacy Network Ambassador of the Year Award** for her work building bridges between the veterinary community and the pet trade. Previously, as a director of the organization, she was instrumental in codifying standards of care and proactively working to educate the public about responsible pet ownership.

Pet Advocacy Network's Chair's Award of Excellence was given to Phil Goss, President of United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK), for his hard work and tireless vigilance to foster positive change in the pet trade, leading to notable successes on issues affecting reptile breeders and keepers. Recently, he and USARK were at the forefront of sounding the alarm and helping form the coalition working to prevent a proposed amendment to the Lacey Act that would have widespread negative implications for the responsible pet trade.

Jeff San Souci, Director of Marketing at the Hagen Group, was awarded the **President's Appreciation Award** for outstanding service to the Pet Advocacy Network. He volunteered significant time and branding expertise to the organization's recent comprehensive rebranding project, and as the World Pet Association's representative to the Board of Directors, he demonstrated unwavering dedication to supporting the organization's work and mission.

The **Pet Care Community Leaders of the Year Award** recognized frontline pet care workers. Pet store clerks, pet food manufacturers, veterinary care providers and others not only continued to work despite

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risks to their own health and safety, they adapted to changing regulations and adopted new safety protocols to ensure that America’s pets continued to receive the care they deserved throughout the uncertain times of the pandemic.

Rick Preuss, owner of Preuss Pets in Lansing, Mich., was given the **Pet Advocate of the Year Award** as a leading voice encouraging continued growth and improvement in efforts to prioritize the health and well-being of animals. For decades, Preuss has hosted educational events in his store, taught in classrooms, and engaged with lawmakers in Michigan and Washington—sharing his experience and expertise as they consider complicated issues such as combatting invasive species.

The **“Power of Pets”** award recognized Michelson Found Animal’s Pet Inclusive Housing Initiative for its goal of overcoming systemic barriers to pet ownership. The coalition encourages private and public apartment buildings and other multifamily residential properties to adopt pet-friendly policies through education, peer-to-peer outreach, and legislative advocacy, fostering increased opportunities for pet ownership for millions of Americans.

Laura “Peach” Reid, President of Fish Mart, received Pet Advocacy Network’s **Nancy G. Knutson Lifetime Achievement Award** for her legacy as one of the most dedicated and motivational advocates in the pet care community. Her decades of activism on pet ownership issues in Connecticut and across the country significantly increased the effectiveness and reach of the Pet Advocacy Network’s work. As PIJAC’s first female Board chair, her leadership helped steer the organization through a difficult transition and into the respected role it currently enjoys.

“The passion for pet well-being and persistence in advancing the responsible pet care community of each of these award recipients is truly exemplary,” said Pet Advocacy Network President and CEO Mike Bober. “From selfless undertakings during a pandemic to impactful grassroots educational efforts, we are thankful for their efforts to cultivate positive change and promote animal well-being on behalf of the responsible pet care community.”

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About Pet Advocacy Network

The [Pet Advocacy Network](#) connects the experience and expertise of the responsible pet care community to lawmakers and governing bodies, advocating for legislative and regulatory priorities at the local, state, federal and international levels. Since 1971, the organization has worked to promote animal well-being and responsible pet ownership, foster environmental stewardship, and ensure access to healthy pets, including small animals, cats, dogs, fish, reptiles and birds. Pet Advocacy Network members include retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, wholesale distributors, manufacturers’ representatives, pet hobbyists, and other trade organizations.

