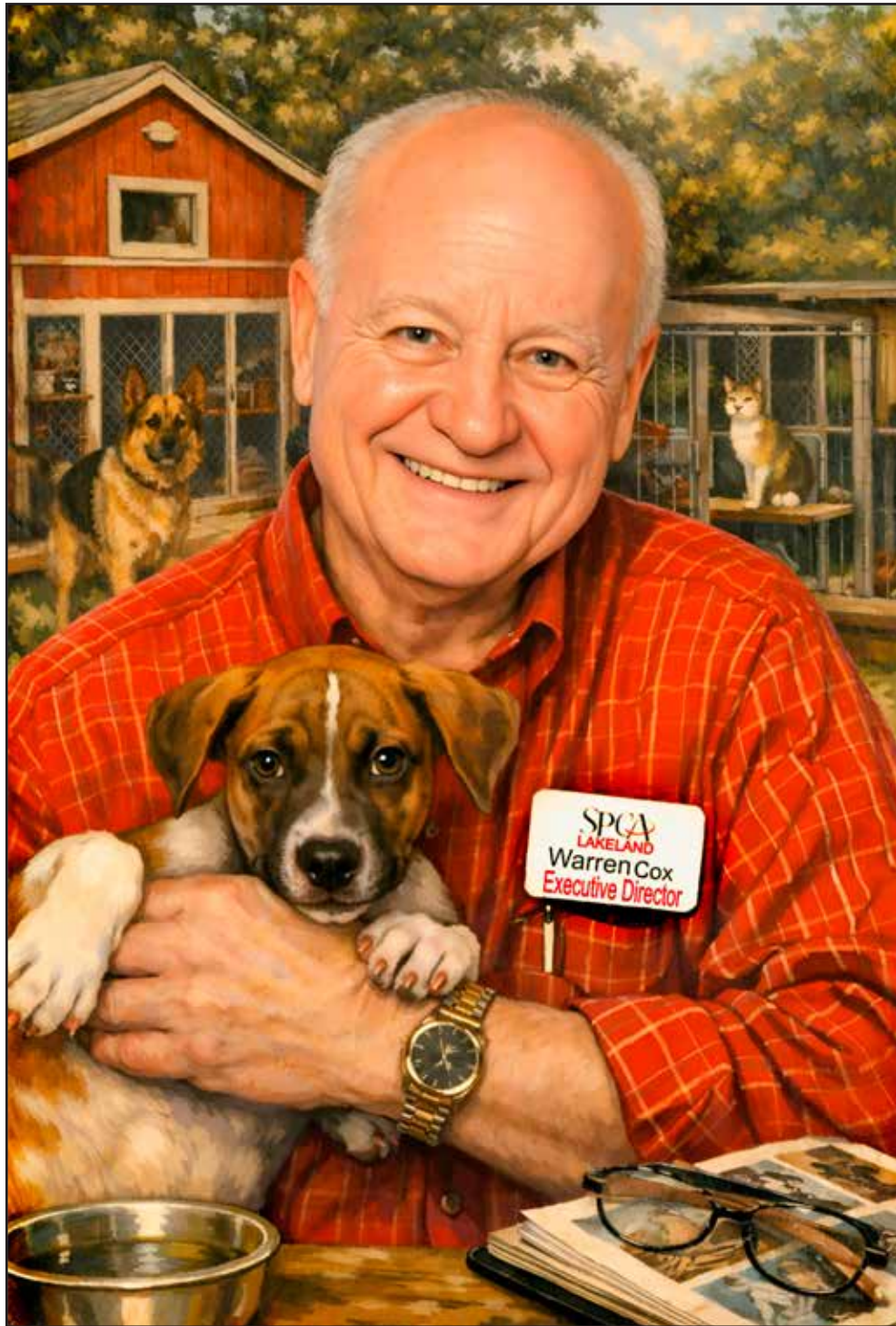


Warren Cox



by Merritt & Beth Clifton, editors
www.Animals24-7.org

“Everything” about Warren Cox

A few weeks ago Warren Cox called, while my wife Beth and I were putting up cat climbing ramps and resting boards in our new back porch “catio,” and asked if we could put together “everything” we had written about him into a little booklet, so that he could show his grandchildren what he had been doing for 60-odd years.

“Everything?” I asked. That would include my four years as news editor at the long defunct *Animals’ Agenda* monthly magazine, 22 years as editor of the also long defunct *Animal People* monthly newspaper, and the dozen years that Beth and I have produced the **ANIMALS 24-7** daily news website.



Warren Cox circa 1970.

“Everything,” Warren insisted, but “everything” would amount to an encyclopedic multi-volume complete history of animal care and control and humane work since the mid-twentieth century, at least.

Warren, at his last of many nominal “retirements,” was the longest-tenured leader ever of animal care and control and humane organizations by at least a decade, beginning a year before I was born. Warren has been among my most frequent and valued sources of news, information, and perspective for more than thirty years.

Even at our first meeting, Warren was the senior leader in the humane field, with 30 years of leadership experience behind him.

Most often, though, as is Warren’s way, he has been quietly in the background, recognized in my reportage only in a couple of quotes. The focus of almost all of the dozens of articles written based on tips that Warren provided has remained on the many other sources and subjects he helped me, and later me and Beth, to discover.

Warren has similarly helped and inspired Beth, who is not only my wife but also the **ANIMALS 24-7** photographer and collage artist, sparking ideas, while seldom actually being in the picture.

Warren is, of course, in the pictures here, many of them prepared just for this project.



Warren Cox.

Warren Cox headed animal control departments and humane societies from 1952 to 2012, always working at the leading edge of positive change.

I used to joke that his first job in the animal care and control field was shoveling poop for Noah. Warren contradicted me once, claiming to have actually been Noah's director of investigations.

I think the very first time Warren and I met, years after I first heard of him through many mutual acquaintances, was in the lunchtime chow line at the 1993 American Humane Association conference in Baltimore.

What I thought was a serving dish of cole slaw turned out to be shredded chicken. As a lifelong vegetarian I raised immediate hell.

Some of the American Humane Association people, including animal protection division chief Dennis White, responded that it was no big deal that the food wasn't marked as to what was veg and what wasn't because very few of the attendees were vegetarians.

I had not yet seen Warren, who had been standing right behind me in line, talking to others. At that point he stepped forward and said, "Well, I'm vegetarian."

That stopped everything. Something I did not yet know, but learned later, was that Warren had given Dennis his first job in humane work, and had also fired him at some point.

Years later, the American Humane Association hired Dennis over Warren, whom the American Humane Association board deemed "too old," though Warren was still on the job, leading and teaching, decades after Dennis unfortunately died young.

Despite Warren having fired Dennis, Dennis had a huge regard for Warren. When Warren spoke, Dennis listened. He agreed that the "veg" and "non-veg" food should have been clearly identified. Warren and I received a round of apologies on the spot, including from the hotel staff.



Vicky Crosetti.

The food was clearly labeled “veg” and “non-veg” at every American Humane Association conference I attended thereafter, right up to the last one ever in 2007.

Warren introduced himself during that fracas. That night I joined Warren and longtime mutual friends from the conference Vicky Crosetti, Rick Collord, Phil Arkow, John Snyder, Pat and Paul Miller, and others for a big vegetarian dinner at a Greek restaurant Phil knew. Not everyone there was veg, but for the evening they were.

A year later, in 1994, I attended a meeting of The Association of Sanctuaries [TAOS] in Dallas, while visiting animal sanctuaries, shelters, and zoos throughout central Texas.

Warren was there, as then president of the Dallas SPCA, among dozens of others. After the day of conferencing we attended a big vegetarian dinner party hosted by the Summerlee Foundation.

Late in the party, Warren suddenly recalled that he had not done his daily nose count of the shelter animals and walk-through shelter inspection, and had not remembered to delegate the job to anyone else. He had already offered to drop me off where I was staying on his way home, so asked if I would like to tag along.

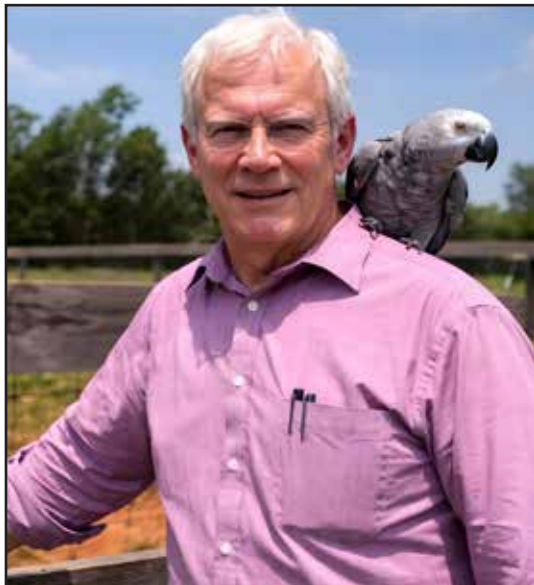
We drove across town to the Dallas SPCA shelter. Warren, wearing his good suit, started the nose count, but had barely begun when he found a fresh mess in a cage that the night staff had already cleaned once. Thus I snapped a photo of Warren scooping poop in his good suit, with a wall clock in the background showing that it was 2 a.m., though it was actually probably closer to ten thirty p.m.

I published the photo at some point, but Beth & I have not been able to find it again all these many years later.

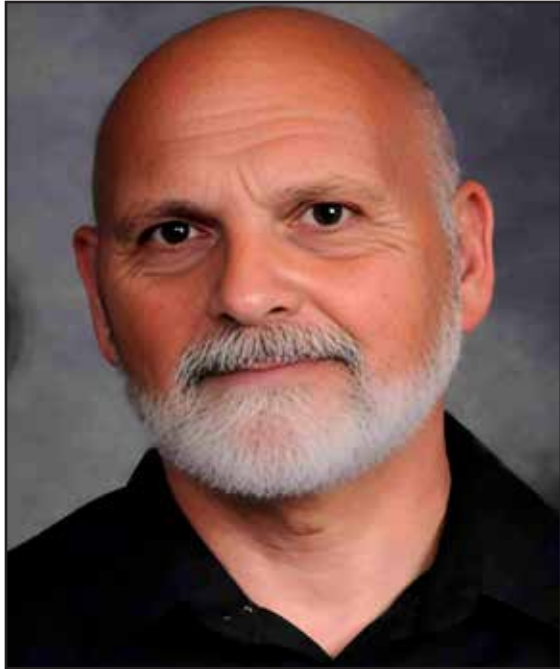
That was the night I learned from Warren about the importance and multiple uses of fire extinguishers in an animal shelter. I was familiar with fire extinguishers from prior service as a firefighter, but not with how a fire extinguisher can be used effectively to break up fights among animals and even to stop all-out pit bull attacks.



Dennis White.



Rick Collord.



Mike Burgwin.

The key to success with a fire extinguisher, Warren explained, is that it is not a weapon in the traditional sense. It is more like a giant spray can full of a powerful sedative. Get the dog's head into a cloud of fire extinguisher foam and the dog will have to start concentrating on breathing, instead of biting and mauling.

Beth and I have passed this tip along countless times in the many years since, and have seen it save many lives, both human and animal, often in situations where a gun would have been the next and last resort.

Warren also offered his observations that evening about dangerous dog behavior in general, including about the so-called "Prussian school" of dog training introduced to the U.S. during his early career as the "Wilhelm Kohler method," and more recently re-introduced and re-popularized by Cesar Millan.

"If you think you have to beat a dog and jerk the dog around to make the dog safe," Cox said, "then you shouldn't have the dog."

About another year later, I crossed paths with Warren and Dennis White again at the 1995 American Humane Association conference in New Orleans.

Dennis had also become a friend and good source. Unfortunately, Dennis had a drinking problem. After the first day of conferencing, Vicky Crosetti, Rick Collord, and I were asked by several of the other American Humane Association senior staff to be keep an eye on Dennis while we all wandered around together among the jazz joints in the French Quarter.

Unfortunately we lost Dennis in the crowd, probably because I was enjoying the jazz too much, delaying the others while I listened.

We saw Warren on the street, split up into multiple search parties, and went looking. But by the time Warren found



Mary Pat Boatfield.

Dennis and dragged him out of whatever saloon he was in, he was drunk as a lord and had been seen reeling drunk by the whole American Humane Association board. They fired him the next morning.

I saw Dennis right afterward. There was nothing much to say. We had all failed our responsibilities, except Warren, who had come through, but too late.

Dennis had been trying to broker a merger of the American Humane Association with the Humane Society of the United States. He caught on soon as director of the Southwest regional office of the Humane Society of the U.S., serving six years in that capacity before his sudden death from a heart attack at age 55 on October 20, 2001.

Remembering that episode brings to mind the small galaxy of others, mostly also longtime mutual friends, whose obituaries I have written with information supplied by Warren.

A short and probably incomplete list includes, in alphabetical order, Mary Pat Boatfield, Mike Burgwin, Rick Collord, Vicky Crosetti, Mert Davis, Pat Derby, Bob Hillman, Dan Knapp, Darlene Wohler Larson, Patt Nordyke, Kent Robertson, Eric Sakach, Phil Snyder, Glenn Summerlin, and Gary Tiscornia, in addition to Dennis White, of course.



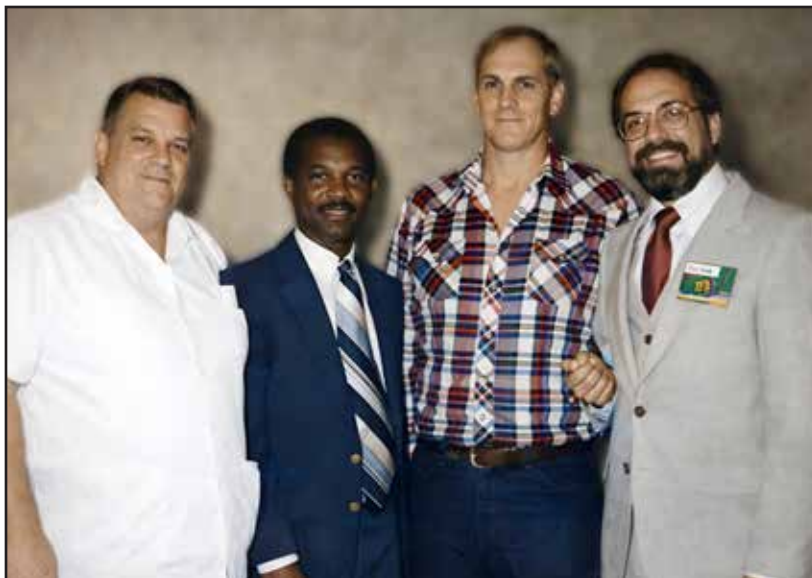
Kent Robertson.



***Darlene Wohler Larson.
(Beth Clifton collage)***

Those names and their stories are in themselves a history of the most recent half century or more of the humane movement they all were part of. Among them, though, Warren was first into the field, by a decade or more, and last to retire.

Warren also furnished my personal bridge back to the twenty years before his time, bequeathing to me in August 2005 a complete set of the last 43 years of *National Humane Review*, a monthly news magazine published by the American Humane Association from 1913 to 1976.



National Animal Control Association founding members, from left to right, Doyle Nordyke, Wendall Ford, Mike Burgwin, and Phil Arkow.

Upon receipt of the set, I lost many days over many weeks reading every edition from cover to cover. Cumulatively, those old magazines were the record of where the humane movement came from, where it was when Warren began, and how it evolved until approximately the time I began covering it, filling in many a gap in my understanding and helping to add the historical dimension to my reporting ever since.

The *National Humane Review* news magazine terminated about two years before Warren served his own

brief stint with the American Humane Association. During that time Warren made one of his most enduring institutional contributions to the animal care and control field.

As Phil Arkow narrated in 2018, at the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the National Animal Control Association, “NACA was formed at a meeting in Englewood, Colorado,” at the American Humane Association offices, on September 27, 1978. Its purpose was and is to provide training for all those involved with animal regulatory agencies and to provide a means for communication between all agencies involved with animals throughout the world, i.e., create a worldwide source of information for member use.

“The National Animal Control Association was formed,” Phil recounted, “because Mike Burgwin, director of a county animal control agency in the state of Oregon, was frustrated by the lack of a source of information on animal control. He felt he was forever reinventing the wheel.

“Mike along with some others formed a state association in Oregon, and it soon became obvious to him that if it worked that well in the state, why not nationwide?

“Mike contacted Warren Cox, at that time director of the Animal Protection Division of the American Humane Association. Warren agreed to mail a letter, which Mike was to write, to all animal control agencies on the American Humane Association’s mailing list.

“Forty-nine people representing twenty-four states came to the meeting and voted to form the National Animal Control Association. Mike Burgwin was elected chairman, with the responsibility of writing the bylaws for the newly formed association.”

The National Animal Control Association helped immensely to further the transition of the field from “dog-catching” to animal care and control, especially in the early years of NACA

by advancing the replacement of decompression chambers and gas chambers used to kill surplus dogs and cats *en masse* with sodium pentobarbital injections.

Warren made his next major contribution to the entire animal care and control field by helping to introduce the North Shore Animal League / Pet Savers Foundation animal shelter outreach assistance program, begun in 1990.

“Cox became acquainted with the North Shore/Pet Savers outreach effort,” I wrote in May 1995, “while in his previous post, at the Greenhill Humane Society in Eugene, Oregon. The current Greenhill executive director, Mert Davis, has continued the programs Cox initiated, with North Shore help, and the two now have a friendly rivalry as to who can increase adoptions more. As of the end of 1994, Davis was slightly ahead, 58% to 54%.”

“North Shore has done more to help humane organizations than any other organization I’m aware of,” states Cox. “They have taught us that we can no longer do what we have done for so many years, namely euthanize huge numbers of animals while claiming to have no alternative, and that if we want to help animals, we have to change our way of doing things; that we have to market and to educate.”

“Some of the tactics Cox says he’s learned,” I continued, “have included using an adoption form that indicates positive rather than negative information, giving adopters an insurance policy that provides free medical care for adopted animals, and incentives and ways to showcase hard-to-adopt animals.

“Much of this,” Cox adds, amounts to “ways to build staff morale. Shelter staff feel good when they’re placing animals in homes, rather than killing them.”

Mert Davis seconded Warren. “We already had a good adoption program when we were



Elisabeth Lewyt (1913-2012), headed the North Shore Animal League from 1969 until shortly before her death.

accepted into the North Shore/Pet Savers program,” Davis told me. “Our adoption program has become even better because of our affiliation with North Shore. Basically, we doubled our adoption rate. From them we learned about putting the puppies in the back, so that people see the adult dogs first. Our adoption rate on adult dogs went up. We learned about ‘twofer’ adoptions: double adoptions on cats and kittens. Our adoption rate on cats and kittens went up. The ads they helped us run in our local newspapers increased our exposure in the community and increased our adoptions. The only complaints we

got were from a few of our local pet stores: we were competing with them.”

The North Shore Animal League / Pet Savers Foundation outreach assistance program, spotlighted at a mini-conference for 31 animal shelter directors that Warren co-hosted, helped to inspire the first-ever No Kill Conference, held on September 23, 1995 in Phoenix, Arizona.

This was the first-ever formal gathering of the no-kill community. The host, Doing Things for Animals, later absorbed into the North Shore Animal League, published an annual *No-Kill Directory*, facilitating a rapid growth of communication among no-kills.

As keynote speaker, I emphasized the importance of using targeted spay/neuter programs, neuter/return of feral cats, and breed-specific legislation to eliminate influxes into shelters of un-handleable cats, pit bulls, and other dogs unsuitable for adoption.

Warren did not speak, but his endorsement of the No Kill Conference, as almost the first registrant, brought along many of the other 60-odd attendees.

“Maybe old dogs can learn new tricks,” Cox said. “I’m going there to learn.”



Ed Sayres.
(Beth Clifton collage.)



Then-San Francisco SPCA president Richard Avanzino, “In The Name Of Mercy” author Ed Duvin, and Doing Things for Animals founder Lynda Foro at the 1998 No Kill Conference.

Said Ed Sayres, a second-generation career animal shelter director whose resume included having headed the animal care division of the American Humane Association, PetSmart Charities, the San Francisco SPCA, and the American SPCA, “If there is ever a Humane Hall of Fame, Warren should be in the first class of inductees.

“When I hosted the second No Kill Conference during my American Humane Association time, Warren was the only Society of Animal Welfare Administrators

member who kept saying to his fellow members that we should be open to new ideas. The others took about five years and in many cases 10 years to become open to alternative strategies.”

“Everything,” for the purposes of this booklet, came down to just the four major articles in which Warren was most prominent, plus the many anecdotes above and a few more recent memories.

The four articles are the profile of Warren I wrote at his first “retirement,” from the Dallas SPCA in 2003; an article detailing his role, along with other longtime National Animal Control Association stalwarts Doug Fakkema and John Snyder, in reforming animal shelter killing practices; an article recounting his many conflicts over the years with rodeo, which might be described as the most public form of animal abuse routinely practiced in the United States; and a 2021 review of the many lessons about animal shelter management taught by Warren to generations of younger animal shelter directors.

Inasmuch as our long acquaintance with Warren has always been more professional than personal, Beth and I leave remembrances of Warren’s family, to whom he has always been devoted, to the family members.



Katie. (Beth Clifton collage)



Emma Rose when adopted.

But we will say a few words about Emma Rose, the dog whose companionship Warren shares with wife Jody. After the death of Katie, their beloved wheaten terrier, in 2018, Warren imagined he was too old to have another dog, but clearly missed having a dog.

Beth and I urged Warren and Jody to adopt another dog, pledging that if the time ever came when he and Jody could no longer look after the dog, we would take the dog into our own home.

Finally, on July 9, 2019, Warren introduced us by email to “your new Goddog,” Emma Rose, a hound mix, who “came home with us from Plano Animal Services.”

Emma Rose since then has joined Warren and Jody as frequent and ever welcome correspondents.

December 2003:

Dean of animal care & control Warren Cox retires after 50 years on the job

DALLAS, Texas--Warren Cox retired on November 18, 2003, after just over 50 years in animal-care-and-control, serving with 18 agencies in nine states.

Even 50 years ago, Warren Cox believed animal control sheltering did not have to be like running a slaughterhouse, he told **ANIMALS 24-7**. Though he never ran a no-kill agency, Cox--a longtime vegetarian--experimented wherever he went with ways of reducing the killing, succeeding just enough to keep dreaming.

Just out of high school, Cox took a job as a dogcatcher in Lincoln, Nebraska. "I had a pickup truck with a cage on it," Cox recalled. "It was primitive, but looking back I'd have to say we were progressive. We housed dogs in social groups. It was later that the idea came in that you shouldn't let even friendly dogs mingle."

Drafted into the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Cox was made a mule driver in the 35th Quartermasters Corps. He brought to the work an insight: "You don't drive a mule. You let the mule drive, and you hold the reins. If you're gentle with him, he'll go where you want. Usually."



Jeri & Warren Cox.

Following military duty, Cox took a position at the Animal Humane Society of Hennepin County, Minnesota. In 1958 his boss recommended him to head the animal control department in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

There was a new TV station in town, and Cox did his first broadcasts in Cedar Rapids, live in the studio with dogs and cats, to promote pet licensing and adoptions.

Cox also met a young woman named Jeri, who lived across the street from the shelter. They married. She has traveled with him ever since. Their first stops together included Elkhart, Indiana, where Cox headed a slightly larger animal control unit; the Animal Rescue League of Iowa, in Des Moines; and Marshalltown, Iowa, where Cox helped to start the Animal Rescue League of Marshalltown. There Cox again did TV, as a regular guest on *The Marshall J. Show*, which he recalls as "a live cowboy show for kids."



Daughters Cheri, Linda, Robin, & Susie.

Next Cox served as interim director at the Humane Society of Missouri prior to the tenure of Don Anthony, who headed the organization for more than 20 years. The board considered Cox “too young and radical” for the fulltime job, Cox said, “but I was good enough to keep things running.”

Cox then served as executive director of the Oregon Humane Society in Portland, “until I insisted on inspecting the treatment of animals at the Pendleton Round-Up,” he remembered. “The rodeo had always reserved free seats for the humane society, but the inspectors were kept away from the livestock. I didn’t think that was the way to do things. They fired my chief inspector, and I resigned. Officially it was over a pay issue, but it was really about the rodeo.”

After that, Cox “jumped clear across the county,” serving as first executive director of the Humane Society of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, before returning to Oregon to help build the Humane Society of the Willamette Valley.

Next Cox was director of animal protection for American Humane Association animal protection division chief Milton Searle. Cox had hopes of succeeding Searle, but was told he was too old.

“I left the job at AHA to Dennis White,” Cox told **ANIMALS 24-7**, “and went to Boca Raton.”

White, 10 years younger, headed the AHA animal protection division for 19 years, then headed the Gulf Region office of the Humane Society of the U.S. in Dallas until his death in October 2001.

Cox moved from Boca Raton to Chico, California, where in 1979 he became director of animal control and health services.

A year later Cox moved again, to the Spokane Humane Society. There he again “did a lot of TV work,” he remembered. “We had the right ideas in Spokane, but we were not quite ready to pull them off,” Cox recalls.

Cox returned to Florida to briefly head the Hillsborough County Humane Society in Tampa, realized that was a wrong turn, and returned to Spokane in 1983 to help found SpokAnimal Care. There he hired as his successor Gail Mackey, who served 30 years as executive director.

Cox moved on to the Greenhill Humane Society in Eugene, where he hired another long-tenured successor, Mert Davis, who later worked for him again in Dallas.

After a failed attempt to direct a telemarketing program for humane societies, Cox worked for the Colorado Humane Society, before going to the SPCA of Texas in 1989.

“I never thought I’d last in Dallas anywhere near as long as I did,” Cox laughed. “We’ve gone from 27 staff to 120, and from an annual budget of under \$1 million to a budget of more than \$7 million. We just built and opened the Russell H. Perry Animal Care & Education Campus, and it is debt-free. We didn’t even have a shelter clinic 14 years ago. Now we have a clinic running seven days a week.”

Most important, Cox in Dallas managed to help cut the numbers of dogs and cats killed in local shelters by two-thirds, and saw the formation of a no-kill coalition that hopes to obtain Maddie’s Fund money to get the numbers down to the no-kill threshold, a goal that for Cox has been something of a Holy Grail, glimpsed at a distance but always beyond reach.

Warren and Jeri Cox had four daughters, “dropped off in a lot of the places I used to work,” Cox said. “The husband of one of them works for the Tacoma-Pierce County Humane Society, one is in Arizona, one is in Denver, and another is in Nebraska. Now we’re going to retire to Hudson, Florida.”

Will Cox stay out of shelter work? “I don’t want to run another facility,” Cox said, but he admitted that neuter/return cat colony management interests him.

“Feral cats have a right to live,” Cox stated. So, is Cox going to get involved in the ongoing Florida feral cat controversies? “I expect to keep busy,” Cox said.



Warren Cox on the job. (Beth Clifton collage)

October 2006

Could carbon monoxide gas chambers make a comeback?

Are the surging numbers of dangerous dogs entering animal shelters retarding progress toward abolishing gas chambers?

Warren Cox began to wonder in May 2004 when he arrived for a stint as interim executive director at the Montgomery County Animal Shelter in Dayton, Ohio, and found a carbon monoxide chamber that only a few days before was still in sporadic use.

Having managed more than two dozen shelters since 1952, Cox knew he was looking at an anachronism. The Dayton chamber had supposedly been decommissioned years earlier. The *Dayton Daily News* published exposés of gassing in nearby Fayette County and Darke County in 1995 and 1997 without apparent awareness that animals were still gassed right there in Dayton.

Continued gassing at the Montgomery County Animal Shelter came to light as result of a September 2003 complaint to county officials by veterinarian Sue Rancurello and shelter volunteer Jodi Gretchen, and was discontinued after a shelter evaluation by American Humane affirmed the obsolescence of gassing.

Two top administrators at the Montgomery County Animal Shelter were removed, the *Dayton Daily News* reported, in part for using carbon monoxide instead of lethal injection to euthanize more than the recommended number of animals.

Cox had the carbon monoxide chamber removed. But Cox also took note of who used it, and why. Throughout the first half of Cox's long career in shelter work, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide,



Doug Fakkema.

nitrogen, and decompression chambers were used to kill animals in high volume. The Dayton gas chamber was used to kill specific animals whom some of the staff considered too dangerous to handle.

Cox mentioned to **ANIMALS 24-7** his concern that the influx of bigger, more dangerous dogs might bring gassing back—not because it is safer than sodium pentobarbital injection, but because it is perceived as safer by poorly trained personnel. American Humane had specifically noted poor training at the Montgomery County Animal Shelter.

“Ohio is definitely the last bastion of the carbon monoxide box. When I think carbon monoxide, I think Ohio,” shelter management consultant and euthanasia trainer Doug Fakkema told **ANIMALS 24-7**.

But Cox was not the first to mention to **ANIMALS 24-7** a suspicion that gassing might return to common

use, if not public acceptance, and the shelter personnel who have mentioned it, though mostly from the Midwest and South, have hardly all been from Ohio.

Concern that gassing may regain acceptance tends to take note of rapidly rising insurance costs at shelters that receive large numbers of potentially dangerous dogs, leading to economic pressure to use “no contact” handling methods, such as prevail in Japan.

Add to that the frequency of dangerous dogs being kept by drug-savvy dangerous people, who sometimes feed their dogs home-brewed methadone or other chemicals to stimulate them to fight. There is shelter floor-level suspicion that some of the tough customers who come to look at impounded pit bulls and meanwhile case the shelters for possible burglary are increasingly likely to perceive shelters as a source of both dogs and drugs of potential street value.

Sodium pentobarbital, the lethal injectible recommended by the American Veterinary Medical Association, Humane Society of the U.S., American SPCA, and National Animal Control Association, is a federally controlled barbiturate. Animal sedatives and ketamine, commonly used in sterilization surgery, also have street value.

With shelter break-ins to steal dogs and drugs having approximately tripled in 10 years, shelter staff are often working scared, especially on night shifts in bad neighborhoods and remote locations. Without strong leadership to demonstrate otherwise, many may imagine that the best way to protect themselves is to kill potential fighting dogs immediately, and avoid having drugs on the premises.

“Animal control agency reluctance to use sodium pentobarbital, from my discussions with them, stems from not wanting staff to be handling the animals,” Humane Society of the U.S. director of companion animal issues John Snyder told **ANIMALS 24-7**. “They are concerned about the potential for injuries and the stress on staff, but hundreds of humane societies use sodium pentobarbital and do not have those problems, at least not solely related to euthanasia.



John Snyder.

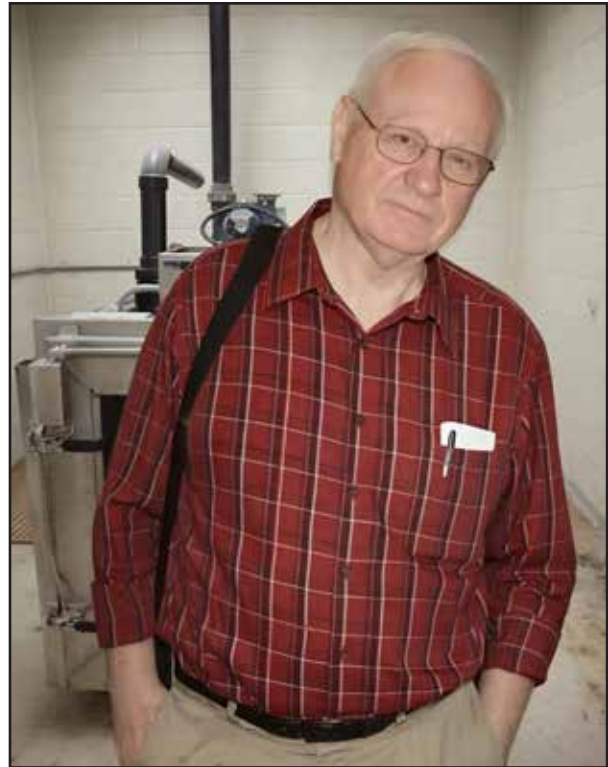
“I used a carbon monoxide chamber for 14 years,” Snyder continued. “I know how they work. Putting vicious animals in the chamber can be quite dangerous, if they are put in the chamber humanely and correctly isolated, or if they are pushed in on the end of a control pole and the door slammed shut. Placing the animal in a segregated cage within the chamber is not without risk.

“If you are handling a dangerous dog or feral cat,” Snyder recommends, “simply give the animal a sedative before sodium pentobarbital, to minimize stress on the animal and injury to the

employee. With dangerous dogs, a breath powered blowgun can deliver the syringe with sedative. You simply wait for that to kick in, and then give the animal the lethal sodium pentobarbital injection, removing the potential for injury to the employee.

“A jab syringe pole or piece of PVC pipe with plastic syringe dart powered by breath does not require a chemical capture course,” Snyder added. “Any competent veterinarian can usually teach all that is needed to do euthanasia sedation.

“Regarding diversion of controlled substances,” Snyder continued, “this will happen from time to time. This has happened at veterinary offices forever, and at a much higher incidence than at animal shelters. Drug and criminal background checks have become more common in government agencies, to screen out potentially risky employees. Cases [of diversion of drugs] are few and far between, considering turnover and other issues,” involved in animal control work, including a longtime high rate of alcohol and recreational drug abuse among staff who become demoralized by killing animals.



Warren Cox got rid of machines like this one.

“This is the same rationale that veterinary associations in many states use to keep shelters from obtaining sodium pentobarbital,” Snyder said, “and from getting direct purchase legislation passed,” allowing shelters to buy sodium pentobarbital without going through a veterinarian.

“There is no mystery about maintaining shelter security of controlled substances,” Snyder maintained. “When shelters store controlled substances according to state and federal regulations, then they’re not going to be easily accessible to thieves. Xylazine (Rompun) added to ketamine denatures the ketamine. It is no longer abusable or usable as a date rape drug. Shelters should not keep un-denatured bottles of ketamine on the premises.

“Animal control work in major cities is more dangerous now for sure,” Snyder acknowledged, “but I believe you will find that in the majority of major cities both animal control and humane societies already use sodium pentobarbital. Street level reality here in Washington D.C. is that the Washington Humane Society has the animal control contract and uses sodium pentobarbital, handling large numbers of bully breeds in one of the most dangerous cities in the U.S., in my opinion, to do animal control.

“In my opinion,” Snyder finished, “shelter directors who play the security card as the principal reason for using carbon monoxide are just throwing out a convenient excuse for not doing the right thing.”

Affirmed Fakkema, “Using euthanasia by injection on dangerous dogs, mandated in many states with high populations of dangerous dogs, is a training and equipment issue. This comes up in many of the classes I teach. With the right training, equipment, and pre-euthanasia anesthetics, any dog can be safely euthanized by injection.

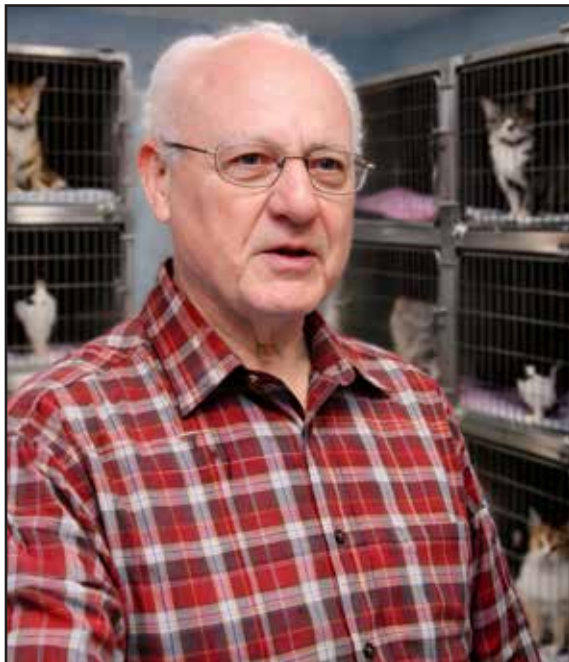
“In order to put a dangerous dog in a chamber,” Fakkema contended, “he or she must first be put on a rabies pole. I can euthanize a dangerous dog in his/her kennel by feeding sodium pentobarbital--no handling necessary. Or, once on the pole, I can put the dog behind a restraint gate and administer ketamine/xylazine compound intra-muscularly to anesthetize the dog for completely safe euthanasia by injection.

“In my experience euthanizing animals, only about 10% of dogs need to be anesthetized prior to euthanasia,” Fakkema added. “It is not necessary to anesthetize all animals prior to euthanasia.”

Among the selling points for sodium pentobarbital is that using it avoids the risk of accidental gassing, an occasional occurrence at shelters with the walk-in lethal rooms that were part of standard shelter architecture as recently as 20 years ago.

The most recent human fatality due to accidental gassing at an animal shelter was Vernon W. Dove Jr., 39, who inadvertently entered the lethal room at the Humane Education Society of Chattanooga on March 28, 2000. The Humane Education Society of Chattanooga was fined \$22,800 for related code violations by the Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

As recently as May 2006, the North Carolina Department of Labor told WXII News in Lexington that it was investigating a potential human safety hazard from gassing at the Davidson County Animal Shelter. “The labor department said a worker complained about having to hold his breath after turning on the gas to kill animals,” reported WXII. “The Davidson County sheriff’s office said there was a gas leak.”



Warren Cox. *(Beth Clifton collage)*

“Staff injury is again a training issue,” Fakkema emphasized. “Staff are injured when the organization fails to provide proper training, equipment, and pre-euthanasia drugs. Good training and safety always go hand in hand.”

Last stand for gas

If a shelter still has a gas chamber, Cox believes, it will be used.

“That’s why we got rid of it in Dayton,” Cox explained. “Perhaps the equipment could have been recycled for something else, but if it exists on the premises, the temptation will always be there to try to solve a problem by whatever somebody thinks might be the easy way.”

August 13, 2021

Rodeo has had free pass from humane groups for 60 years, recalls Cox

Dean of U.S. humane work Warren Cox bucked rodeo before there was an “animal rights movement.”

“The ASPCA, HSUS, PETA et al ignore the Omak Suicide Race. Why?! asked Showing Animals Respect & Kindness [SHARK] founder Steve Hindi in an August 11, 2021 **ANIMALS 24-7** guest column. Hindi’s question reminded Warren Cox, the dean of U.S. humane work and a reformer at every stop, of his many telling conflicts with the rodeo industry decades ago.

Those conflicts foreshadowed the near silence and invisibility of humane organizations in response to rodeo animal abuse today—even when those abuses are as egregious as at Omak, or at the Oakley Pioneer Days Rodeo, where mobs have fired Roman candles at cattle during a “wild cow race” at least since 2011, according to PETA.

After the Boise TV news station KTVB broadcast video of the debacle on July 16, 2021, and after SHARK posted the video to social media, PETA on August 2, 2021 wrote to Cassia County Prosecutor McCord Larsen and Cassia County Sheriff George Warrell, asking that the participants in the Roman candle shooting be prosecuted.

One might expect every other U.S. humane organization of either national or relevant regional scope to do likewise.

Cox now lives quietly with wife Jody and dog Emma Rose in Frisco, Texas, after 60 years in the animal care and control field.

During that time Cox led 22 organizations, often leaving after pushing hard for changes, including opposition to rodeo, that boards of directors were unwilling to risk making. At least three times people Cox hired and trained went on to lead those same organizations for more than 20 years—but those people, while continuing to implement those reforms Cox had managed to introduce, did not challenge community institutions and elected officials head-on, as Cox did.



Challenging rodeo cruelty with a young family was high-risk, but Warren Cox did it anyway, because it was the right thing to do.

Among other animal control departments, Cox for a time headed the Animal Rescue League of Marshalltown, Iowa, an organization he helped to found.

Real vs. fake cowboys

There Cox became a regular television guest on *The Marshall J. Show*, which he recalls as “a live cowboy show for kids.” Cox had no issue against cowboys; in his teens, he had been one. He had even been a rodeo performer, of sorts, while serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

“I think I was on the last march from Denver to Cheyenne for the Frontier Days rodeo back in the fifties,” Cox told **ANIMALS 24-7**. “I was in the 35th Quarter Master Pack along with the 4th Field Artillery Pack,” Cox said. “I remember quite well because I was in administration and I decided to take a nap in the Command tent at lunch time. The next day I got the privilege of walking all day instead of riding. My blister was outstanding.

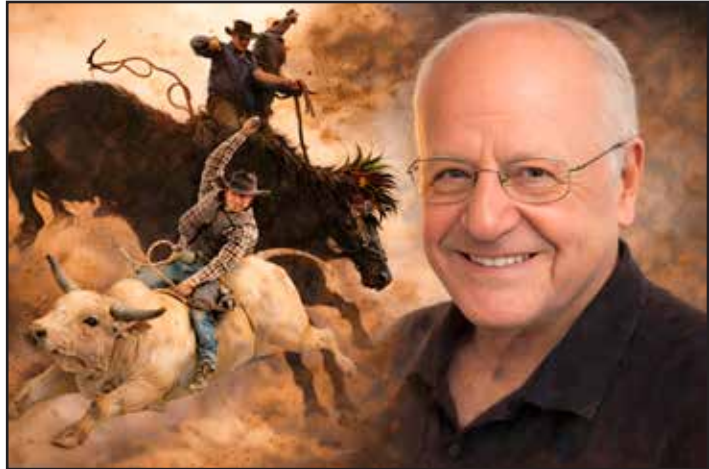
“The mule pack had quite a history,” Cox added. “The only reason that I got in was because they wouldn’t let me in the K-9 corps. They put me where I was to blend in, with a bunch of jackasses.”

Cox got along with jackasses, but had issues with rodeo right from the beginning of his career in humane work. Nothing about rodeo was authentic cowboy work as Cox knew it.

At the time, Cox had backing from the national level. Rodeo had long been resolutely opposed by both the American Humane Association, the only major U.S. national animal advocacy organization from 1877 to 1954, and by the breakaway Humane Society of the U.S.

By 1959, however, rodeo had risen in popularity so rapidly, boosted by the Walt Disney Studios *Spin & Marty* television series, that the American Humane Association readily accepted an invitation from the Rodeo Cowboys Association, which evolved into the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association of today, to draft a set of humane rules for rodeo, and to enforce the rules by assigning inspectors to RCA-sanctioned rodeos.

The American Humane Association rules of 1959 are still the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association [PRCA] rules of today, though rarely if ever enforced to the letter. But the American Humane Association, quit monitoring PRCA rodeos circa 1973.



Warren Cox. (Beth Clifton collage.)



Cheri Cox in 1973.

Hired rodeo investigator

“In 1963 I went to work for the Humane Society of Missouri,” Cox remembered.

“Don Anthony came soon after as the general manager,” Cox continued. “The Humane Society of Missouri had always done cruelty investigations and Don wanted this to continue and expand it to include horse shows and rodeos.

“There was no one on staff capable of doing this,” Cox said, “so I started to look around and somehow became aware of an investigator by the name of John Cason, who was working for Wayside Waifs in Kansas City. John had done some work for Cleveland Amory, some kind of rescue work,” prior to Amory founding the Fund for Animals in 1968.

“Anyway, I was impressed and hired John,” Cox recalled.

“For the next four years John worked horse shows and rodeos throughout the state of Missouri. John maintained it was not enough to just attend the events. He got involved. At the rodeos he was in the chutes and became acquainted with not only the cowboys, but the stock contractors as well. He was well received and actually appreciated by the stock contractors. He exposed many of the things that were being done to make the animals buck, as well as the abuse by the hot shots,” or battery-operated electric prods, then just coming into widespread use.

“When I went to the Oregon Humane Society in Portland in 1967,” Cox said, “the humane society had investigative powers but there was no one on staff able to do investigations, so I asked John to join me.

“That fall the Humane Society received tickets, as they had in the past, to attend the Pendleton Round Up. I sent John. He was joined by Johnny Marston from the AHA.



Steve Hindi.

“Well, John soon found out he was supposed to sit in the stands as a spectator, as it had always been done. Needless to say, John did not, and went to the chutes as he always had.

Fired

“After the rodeo I was called into the office of the humane society president, who told me he had received a complaint from the president of the rodeo, a banker in Pendleton and a state legislator. I was told that I was not ever to do this again.

“Soon after a small rodeo came to Portland. They had poor stock, and as was often the case, cowboys did things to make the horses buck harder, like putting jagged rawhide under the bucking strap.

“Again I was called in to the office of the society president, who said that I had to fire John. I did as I was told, but wrote a letter to the board outlining how things were to be if I was to stay. I was fired, and was on the road again.

“I don’t know if any humane organizations work the horse shows or rodeos anymore,” Cox finished, “but they should. Steve Hindi cannot and should not have to carry all the load himself, but as he pointed out, doing investigations does not make money for the organizations.”

Cox fought bullfighters

Cox, after leaving the Oregon Humane Society, became first executive director of the Humane Society of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, where he successfully fought a campaign led by a local state representative to introduce so-called “bloodless bullfighting” to Florida.

Cox then returned to Oregon as founding director of the Humane Society of the Willamette Valley, then known as the Marion County Humane Society, where he again clashed with rodeo promoters.

There he hired Robert “King” Hillman to investigate rodeo cruelty. A Vietnam veteran, Hillman came originally from Idaho, descended from Mormon homesteaders. Speaking out against the Pendleton Rodeo, Cox recalls, cost both of them their jobs. Hillman, however, remained in humane work for 28 years, heading multiple organizations and joining Cox in helping to found the National Animal Control Association.

Cox went on to serve as director of animal shelters in Boca Raton, Florida, and Chico, California, where yet again he ran afoul of rodeo promoters.

Challenged the Omak Stampede in 1980

Cox first challenged the Omak Stampede after moving on to the Spokane Humane Society in 1980. Cox returned to Florida to briefly head the Hillsborough County Humane Society in Tampa, but rebounded to Spokane in 1983 to help found SpokAnimal Care.

Cox then headed the Greenhill Humane Society in Eugene and the Colorado Humane Society, before directing the SPCA of Texas for 14 years, beginning in 1989.

Nominally retiring in 2002, Cox soon returned to the field as interim executive director for the North County Humane Society in Atascadero, California; the Mohawk & Hudson River Humane Society, in Albany, New York; and the Lakeland SPCA, now the Florida SPCA, where his “interim” stint lasted five years.



Robert “King” Hillman.

September 18, 2021

Fire, crime, shelter management & the wisdom of Warren Cox

ORLANDO, Florida; FRISCO, Texas--“We were able to save 45 cats and 26 dogs,” the Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando posted to Facebook after a late night fire on September 15, 2021.

“We are heartbroken to report that we lost 13 cats and there are four still missing,” the posting continued, between fifteen and sixteen hours after workers at the Orange County Animal Shelter, across a parking lot from the Pet Alliance complex, rang in the first alarm.

The Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando occupied a constellation of buildings of varying age.



Warren & Jody Cox with Emma Rose.

Shelter was “like a maze”

Steve Sherill, the first Orange County Fire Rescue battalion chief to reach the scene, described the complex to Kate Santich, Christobal Reyes, and Stephen Hudak of the *Orlando Sentinel* as “like a maze,” with “several entrances and exits, several buildings attached by little corridors, and concrete walls that sometimes led to a dead end.”

Pet Alliance executive director Steve Bardy told Santich, Reyes, and Hudak that the shelter “was built in 1989 and did not have fire sprinklers, which were not required at the time,” but the



Warren Cox in 2012 at the SPCA of Florida in Lakeland, the last leadership post of his long career.

ANIMALS 24-7 files and a variety of online sources indicate that 1989 was actually when the Orange County Animal Shelter was built, to enable Orange County Animal Services to take over the county animal control housing contract. The oldest parts of the Pet Alliance complex actually were built in 1938, on county-owned land, as part of the deal that awarded the Orange County animal control contract to the Orlando Humane Society for the next 50 years.

“The Pet Alliance is Central Florida’s oldest and largest animal welfare agency, established as the

Orlando Humane Society in 1937 and later becoming the SPCA of Central Florida before being renamed in 2014,” acknowledged Santich, Reyes, and Hudak.

The original Orlando Humane Society structure was enlarged repeatedly with outbuildings and additions, joined together to give the appearance of being one building.

“Fire is always a threat,” observed Warren Cox. Cox now lives quietly with wife Jody and dog Emma Rose in Frisco, Texas, after 60 years in the animal care and control field.

During that time, from 1952 to 2012, Cox headed 22 different organizations. Many of them occupied facilities that were comparably cobbled together, as humane societies and animal control agencies struggled on limited budgets to stay ahead of exploding demand for their services.

Driven by human population growth, chiefly the post-World War II “Baby Boom,” the U.S. dog and cat populations more than quadrupled during Cox’s career.

That alone would have proportionately increased demand for humane services, even if there had been no major changes in what animal shelters were expected to do.

Expanding shelter universe

In 1969, however, mass marketing experts Alex and Elisabeth Lewyt took over the management of the then nearly bankrupt North Shore Animal League America, introducing “no kill” sheltering techniques which saved millions of animals’ lives at cost of requiring vastly expanded workforces and kenneling capacity. North Shore proved that donors would support the investment, and that the investment would then more than pay for itself.

Cox, though he never headed a shelter that claimed to be “no kill,” was a keen observer. Cox had already been perhaps the first animal shelter director to use television to boost adoptions, beginning in 1958 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. As a cofounder of the National Animal Control Association, Cox also helped to lead efforts to abolish killing shelter animals by decompression, ended in the U.S. in 1985.



Jeri (1939-2010) & Warren Cox, with daughters, 2009.

By the time the first U.S. “No Kill Conference” was held in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1995, the fewer than 500 animal shelters serving the U.S. when Cox started had become as many as 4,500. These were augmented within the next decade by as many as 10,000 mostly home-based shelterless “rescues,” few of them actually incorporated, licensed as businesses, and routinely inspected by fire marshals.

Experience and observation, meanwhile, made Cox fire-aware.

Becoming acquainted with Cox at the 1993 American Humane Association conference in Baltimore, **ANIMALS 24-7** met him again at an Association of Sanctuaries meeting in Dallas late the following year. Then in the middle of a 14-year stint as executive director of SPCA of Texas in Dallas, Cox invited **ANIMALS 24-7** to inspect the premises—at 10:00 p.m., after the post-meeting dinner ended.

Arriving circa 10:30 p.m., expecting to find the shelter closed, **ANIMALS 24-7** instead found it humming with cleaning and maintenance personnel—and, though occupying an older building, the shelter was among the cleanest **ANIMALS 24-7** had ever seen. One dog, however, had just pooped in his kennel. Cox, in his go-to-meeting suit, immediately entered the kennel, scooped the poop, and then raced down the row of kennels to catch up with the cleaning crew, to ask that the dog's floor again be washed and disinfected.



Daughter Susie & son-in-law Eric O'Donnell.

Maybe Cox was just “putting on the dog” for a media visitor?

“Hey Warren, why all the fire extinguishers?”

While Cox was busy, **ANIMALS 24-7** took the liberty of wandering through another part of the shelter, encountering old acquaintances and career shelter workers Alex and Mary Stewart, last seen 17 years earlier in San Jose, California, in a kennel floor office.

“You’ll learn something new from Warren every day,” Alex advised. “Just walk around and keep your eyes open.”



Daughter Linda.

Rejoining Cox, **ANIMALS 24-7**—as a former firefighter—noticed an unusual number of home-or-car-sized fire extinguishers hanging on the walls, usually not more than 20 feet apart. The typical animal shelter, at the time, might have one industrial-sized fire extinguisher in the front office and maybe another beside the back door.

The obvious question: “Hey Warren, why all the fire extinguishers, in a concrete-and-steel environment where there is nothing to burn but dog poop and you already have zillions of hoses?”

ANIMALS 24-7, though a veteran of fighting barn fires, soon learned quite a bit more about both firefighting and fire extinguishers.

What fire extinguishers are good for

First Cox explained that a fire starting amid the paperwork in the front office, as the Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando fire apparently did, could rapidly fill an entire shelter with smoke and heat, as concrete walls and ventilation systems could turn passage ways into chimneys.

Though nothing much in the kennel area itself might be combustible, anything that could burn--like a roof--soon might.

Then Cox issued the tip that **ANIMALS 24-7** has amplified ever since, possibly saving countless animal and human lives:

“The main thing you want fire extinguishers in the kennels for, though, is breaking up dog fights and keeping your staff from getting attacked when a big dog escapes and becomes dangerous.”

Having begun logging fatal and disfiguring dog attacks in the U.S. and Canada in 1982, **ANIMALS 24-7** was able to swiftly verify from file information that a fire extinguisher is almost as effective in stopping a dog attack as a gun, and vastly safer to use, since fire-fighting foam never hurts anyone with a ricochet.

The numbers have not changed in the many years since: a gun will stop a dog attack with the first shot about 80% of the time, but with high risk of collateral damage. A fire extinguisher works about 70% of the time, without risk to anyone else nearby.



Daughter Cheri.

What else Warren Cox knows



Daughter Robin & her late husband.

So what else does Warren Cox know, that others can learn from?

A few months ago **ANIMALS 24-7** asked him.

At first Cox said “Not much--animal sheltering is not so much a science as it is a matter of using good sense,” but then Cox began emailing tips, a few at a time.

“Get away from your desk, at least several times a day, to walk the shelter,” Cox mentioned right away. This is why Cox visited the Dallas SPCA at 10:00 p.m.: not just to show the place off to a visiting muckrake, but to make sure everyone assigned to a job was actually doing it, knew what to do, had a chance to ask questions,

and—perhaps most important—made sure everyone working late got a few words of praise and encouragement.

On a second wander-about while Cox was talking to someone else, **ANIMALS 24-7** met a kennel worker who freely admitted to having had drug addiction issues and to having spent half his life in prison. “I never felt like I did anything worthwhile until I worked here,” the man said. “We’re just mopping up dog and cat messes, but Warren makes us feel as if we’re keeping up the Taj Mahal.”

“I was not the smartest guy in the world”

Advised Cox later, “When you first visit a city, visit the zoo and the animal shelter. How a city treats animals will tell you how it treats its citizens.”

“Thinking about the things I have learned over the years,” Cox emailed a few days ago, “from my first management job I realized I was not the smartest guy in the world, so I picked good people to do what I wanted done and was smart enough to let them do it.”

Cox said he later learned this philosophy had been similarly summarized by Theodore Roosevelt, though Teddy Roosevelt reputedly did believe himself to be the smartest guy in the world, at least much of the time. (Mark Twain disputed this.)

“Image is important,” Cox emphasized. “That includes having clean vehicles and neat-appearing staff, as well as a neat shelter and grounds.

“You do not need a big fancy shelter to have a good organization,” Cox stressed, having established his national reputation for effective management while rarely if ever enjoying the luxury of having a shelter that was younger than his youngest personnel.

Soap & water

“Having a place that is clean and well kept-up, a friendly staff, and animals who are well cared for is very important,” Cox repeated.



Warren Cox & all four daughters.

“I have visited large organizations,” as has **ANIMALS 24-7**, “where a lot of these things did not apply,” Cox said.

“I think I got my first manager job in Cedar Rapids,” Cox recalled “in part because I told the board that soap, water, and paint would go a long way—and when I interviewed with the president of the board at his home, I swiped my finger across a piece of furniture in their back

porch that was covered with dust. They laughed and I blushed.

“There is a difference between what looks clean and is clean,” Cox said. “You never know if people are really listening.”

But Cox remembered that once “A young man who worked for me in the kennel quit and went to work for a printing company. One day he stopped by and thanked me for teaching him how to clean. At his new job he was always cleaning. It impressed his boss so much he was given a much better job.



Warren & Jody Cox.

Keeping animals healthy

“In another case,” Cox cited, “there was a volunteer who was assigned to taking care of the cats in a mobile unit. She took care of the cats, but the dust was piling up. She could not understand why I wanted all dust-catching surfaces to be clean, until I explained that the dust held germs. The place became spotless.”

Cox considers keeping animals healthy to be the most important part of animal sheltering.

“It is misplaced kindness to crowd animals together and keep them for long period of times and then place sick animals, or worse, have to euthanize them,” Cox advised, “and this does not address the stress and strain on the staff and the budget, not to mention public image,” when a disease outbreak spreads throughout a shelter and then, in worst-case scenarios, into the community.

Keeping animals healthy includes keeping them psychologically healthy.

“Years ago, in the 1950s,” Cox remembered, “we had community cat rooms and multi-dog pens. Then we moved to single runs. We got lonely animals and more noise, and for the most part, we still do.

“We found it was advantageous, if possible, to place two large dogs together,” Cox recalled. “They keep each other company, so they do not have to seek out company [by barking] when left alone.”

Drug bust

Just hours before the Pet Alliance of Greater Orlando fire broke out, the Flagler County Sheriff’s Office on September 15, 2021 served a search warrant on Ruth Rupprecht of Palm Coast, Florida, who “operates a nonprofit animal rescue organization known as SAFFARI (Save A Furry Friend Animal Rescue Inc.),” a sheriff’s office media release summarized.

Rupprecht came under investigation for allegedly illegally selling prescription narcotics and antibiotics, Flagler County Sheriff’s Office spokesperson Melissa Morreale said.

More than 100 prescription medications and \$20,000 in cash were seized from the prem-

ises, along with 17 dogs, 28 cats, a squirrel, and a deceased kitten, “discovered living in filthy conditions,” Morreale added. The 46 surviving animals, including a kitten who later died, were transferred to the Flagler Humane Society.

Such cases, in which a shelter or “rescue” founder allegedly uses the organization as a front for suspected drug dealing and embezzlement are, unfortunately, not unique.

But far more common are cases of staff doing similar things, often for many months and even years before higher-ups notice.



Warren & Jody Cox.

Cox, whose career included stints directing animal shelters in Fort Walton Beach, Boca Raton, Tampa, and Lakeland, Florida, also has thoughts about preventing crime in shelters.

“It pays to listen to staff,” Cox began.

Petty theft adds up

For example, Cox recalled, “I had taken a new position and was just meeting staff and learning about the place. Behind the receiving counter was a cleaning closet. On the door jamb was a small wire hook with a ring at the top for the finger and the bottom had a hook. I asked what this hook was used for, and I was shown. The counter had a stainless steel top and at one end was a donation box fastened to the counter. The staff person said. ‘You put your finger in the loop at the end, stick the wire into the donation box, and remove the paper bills. Simple.’

“In another case,” Cox recounted, “when the field officer collected a donation, he was supposed to send out a thank you note showing the amount of the donation. It was felt that money was being collected but not shown, so we had the dispatcher sending out the thank you. Then we found out that the officer and the dispatcher were splitting the donations.



Warren Cox on 91st birthday.

“In another case an employee showed me how the staff had been shown how to place a piece of tape under the place where the fee was indicated [on a carbon copy]. The client had a receipt but the amount was not shown on the other part of the record.

“One day I was making the inspection of a puppy room,” Cox told **ANIMALS 24-7**, “and I stumbled against the donation box on the wall beside the door. It was locked with a small padlock. By chance I pulled down on the lock and it came open. The inside had been jimmied, but the person assigned to open the box still had to use a key.”

At yet another shelter, Cox described, “We had a large store room where cases of soda were kept to fill the vending machines. Since I parked my car at the back of the building, I had to walk down the long hall past the store room. Often a staff person would join me, at times carrying a six pack of soda. I never thought to ask if the staff person had paid for it. Later I found it was a big joke that I never caught on.”

Listening to staff also includes paying attention to who actually does the work.

At one stop, Cox remembered, “I went to the shelter on Sunday and was talking to the person cleaning the kennels. I asked if working alone was a hardship, as the cleaning was usually a two-person job. The worker said no, as it didn’t take two people. Watch and ask.”

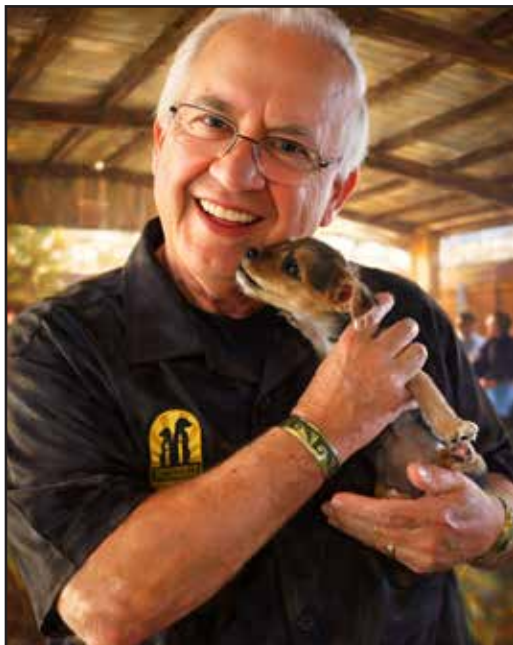
“The animal sits but refusing people makes staff feel important”

Cox increased adoptions and decreased euthanasia at every stop during his long career, developing a deep skepticism of standard adoption procedures.

“Is collecting a high adoption fee important, when the animal is retained for long periods of time?” Cox asks rhetorically. “Why don’t more organizations keep track of how long it takes to adopt an animal and what is the daily cost of keeping the animal?”

“This reminds me that many years ago a home visit was required of prospective adopters,” Cox recalled. That was a carryover from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when humane societies often ran orphanages and some rehomed more children than dogs and cats.

“Rescue groups are really bad about this today,” Cox said. “The animal sits, but refusing people makes the staff person feel important.”



Mike Arms.

Credit check reduces stress for all

Mike Arms, president of the Helen Woodward Animal Center in Rancho Santa Fe, California and the international Home-4-the-Holidays program it coordinates, and a longtime friend of Cox, has in his 55 years of humane work facilitated more than a million dog and cat adoptions, beginning through the North Shore Animal League America and the Pet Adoptathon it sponsors each spring.

After years of refining adoption screening procedures to reduce stress for all concerned, Arms since 2005 has recommended just asking prospective adopters for a piece of photo identification, such as a driver’s license, plus a major credit card.

The photo ID establishes that the person is whoever he or she claims to be. The major credit card enables the adoption agency to run an online credit check.

While an adoption counselor helps the adopter to choose and become acquainted with a pet, a data processing clerk quickly accesses all of the information that could be obtained through a traditional questionnaire, pre-verified by the agency that compiles the credit history.

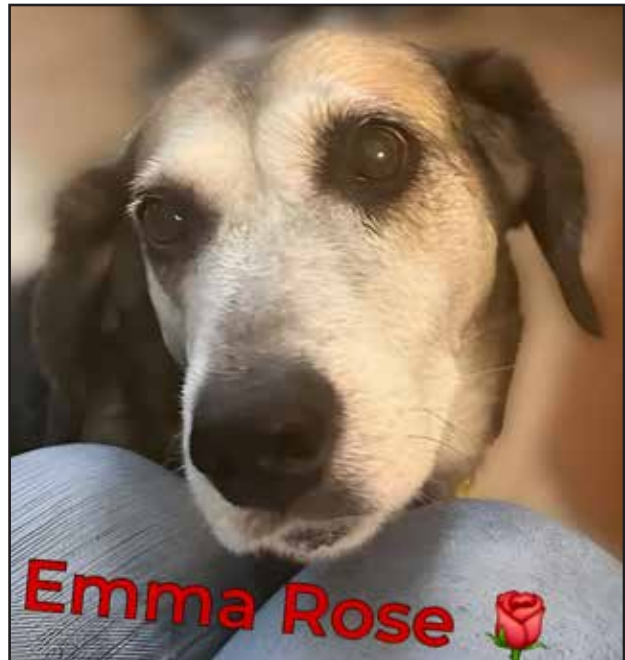
“Know when to pick your battles”

Cox is also critical of shelters “that close early or are closed when people are off work,” able to visit a shelter, and of shelters that accept and adopt out animals only by appointment.

Such practices discourage adoptions, increase animal abandonments, and erode public willingness to visit shelters.

“It is important to stick up for the rights of animals, but know when to pick your battles,” Cox advised.

“It does not matter who gets the credit [for an improvement in procedures or facilities], as long as the goal is met,” Cox said, “a lesson I learned 40 years ago when I had pushed hard for a retaining fence around the shelter to no avail, until a board member noted that we should have such a fence. I started to say, ‘That is what I have been telling you,’ but stopped when I realized I had gotten what I wanted.



Emma Rose, adopted by Warren & Jody Cox from the Plano Animal Shelter.



Warren, Susie, & Jody in background.

“What’s in a name?”

“Ever notice how the title of the person in charge has changed over the years?” Cox asked. “In the 1950s it was superintendent, then manager, then executive director, and now president and chief executive officer.

“In animal control it was dogcatcher and pound master, then animal control director, and now director of animal services, and I am sure I have missed a few.”

Each new managerial title signifies greater responsibilities, more people to supervise, higher public expectations, and more chances to be fired.

Cox noted the cliché that, “If the board likes you, you can do no wrong, but if they do not

like you, then you can do nothing right.” But there is more to just that involved in keeping an animal shelter management job. “Staff also plays a big part in having a manager removed,” Cox mentioned.

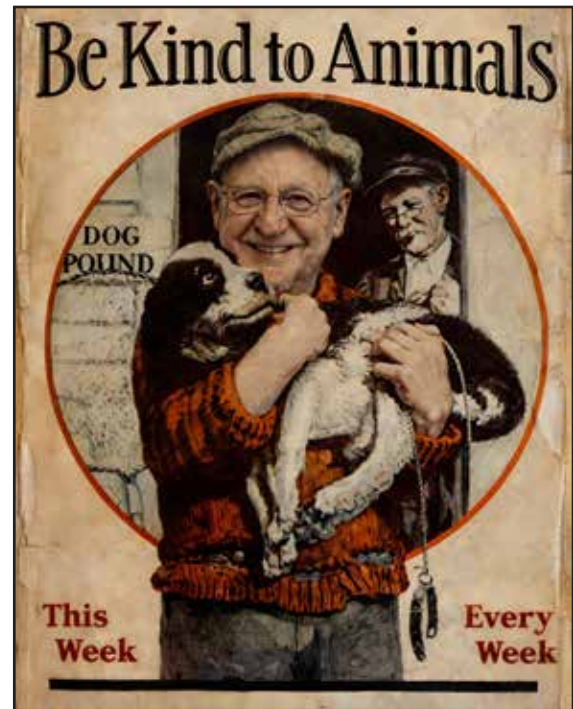
Regardless of procedural firewalls, some staff members and volunteers will almost always develop access to board members, enabling them to undermine managerial efforts to introduce change.

“Employment contracts for years were no more than an outline of what was expected and at what salary. That changed to provide some level of protection for the manager, because boards change,” Cox observed. “Some people come on a board simply to get rid of the manager.

“It is important, regardless of the size of organization, for the manager to make contact with the donors, in person if possible so you can tell your story,” Cox advised.

“Become the face of the organization through the media,” Cox recommended.

“It may be hard, but it pays off,” Cox finished. “One example was when on a weekly radio show the host and I were talking about things we needed. I mentioned one thing and had it within days, and that was just the beginning of a friendship.”



(Beth Clifton collage)



About the authors

ANIMALS 24-7 social media editor, collage artist, photographer, and researcher Beth Clifton brings to her work extensive hands-on experience with a wide range of wild, exotic, and domestic animal species, including as a former mounted police officer, animal control officer, veterinary technician, and school teacher.

ANIMALS 24-7 editor Merritt Clifton, reporting about animal & environmental topics since 1968, covered issues involving Warren Cox as news editor for the *Animals' Agenda* magazine, 1988-1992, editor of the *Animal People* newspaper, 1992-2013, editor of the annual *Watchdog Report on Animal Charities*, 1999-2013, and of course at **ANIMALS 24-7**, founded with Beth in 2014. Merritt was keynote speaker at the first No Kill Conference, which Warren attended, in 1995.



Warren Cox, 91, with wife Jody finding matches to light the cake with.