

Joanne 'Jo' Wright

Founder of nonprofit PA PETS in Bloomsburg



Celebrating the Legacy of Joanne “Jo” Wright

August 15, 1937 – December 2, 2024

Joanne “Jo” Wright was a visionary, a tireless advocate, and a beacon of hope for animals in need. She founded PA PETS in 1983 because she saw a pressing need to act. At the time, the local PSPCA shelter euthanized 85% of the animals that were surrendered or found—not because they were suffering or terminally ill, but simply because there were too many without homes. The heartbreak this caused Jo was profound, and it sparked her determination to make a difference.

Jo was never one to back down from a challenge. Fearless and resolute, she set her sights on improving the lives of animals—one life at a time.

In 1983, Jo rallied a small group of like-minded individuals to raise awareness and funds to address the plight of unwanted animals. Within just five weeks, she and her colleagues submitted 13 letters to the editor in local newspapers, ensuring PA PETS gained visibility. Back then, letters to the editor were a powerful way to reach the

community.

Jo's passion turned into action. She had a logo for PA PETS created by a local artist and began organizing fundraising efforts—selling t-shirts, hosting quilt sales, holding auctions, and running benefit horse shows. PA PETS also conducted obedience classes and offered free pet education in schools, retirement homes, and civic organizations. Jo's dedication extended to dressing up volunteers, friends, and family in dog costumes for events to draw attention to the cause.

By 1984, Jo had purchased an old grocery store in Bloomsburg and, along with her colleagues, transformed it into the PA PETS Thrift Store. This store, still thriving four decades later, has become a vital source of funding for veterinary expenses.

Jo's determination didn't stop there. In 1985, she persuaded local veterinarians to adopt a fee schedule for spaying and neutering services. This effort, though challenging, yielded significant results—a 10% decline in needless animal deaths reported by the SPCA that same year.

PA PETS officially became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in 1987. By their 6th anniversary in 1990, they had already spayed or neutered 1,000 animals. By 1995, that number grew to 4,236.

In 2012, Jo turned her attention to the region's homeless and feral cats. Recognizing their plight—living in barns, alleyways, or hidden under bridges without consistent shelter or food—Jo launched the PA PETS "Feral" Program. With the help of volunteers, she spearheaded a Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) initiative to prevent the unchecked growth of feral cat populations. This program flourished, funded by an annual dinner/auction and supplemented by grants. Today, the TNR program has spayed, neutered, and vaccinated 10,000 feral cats—thanks to Jo's vision and unwavering perseverance.

On PA PETS' 40th anniversary, the organization has spayed or neutered an incredible 44,500 animals. This extraordinary achievement began with one woman's determination to help. Jo rarely accepted "no" as an answer, inspiring a small but dedicated group of volunteers to join her in working toward a lofty goal. Together, their commitment to saving animal lives has left an indelible mark on the community.

In Jo's honor, we carry her legacy forward, striving for a world where every animal has a chance at love and companionship. Her life's work reminds us that one person's passion can ignite change and create a legacy that touches countless lives.

Thank you, Jo, for your tireless efforts and the example you set. May your legacy inspire us all.