

# New York Law Journal

## Q&A: Jane Hoffman

By Christine Simmons  
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*(Photo: Rick Kopstein/New York Law Journal)*

Jane Hoffman, 60, is president and chair of the board of directors of the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, a nonprofit organization that provides resources to about 150 animal shelters and rescue groups in New York. The Alliance—the largest and longest running collaboration of animal rescue groups and animal shelters in the United States—aims to increase adoptions as well as spaying and neutering to reduce the euthanasia of cats and dogs in New York City. The Alliance works routinely with NYC Animal Care & Control, the nonprofit group under contract with the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene that provides animal control services.

Hoffman worked as a tax librarian at Dewey Ballantine while taking night classes at Brooklyn Law School, earning a law degree in 1984. She gained connections as a tax associate at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett from 1985-88. Later, she worked in-house for a management consulting firm and had her own practice.

Hoffman helped found the Alliance in 2003. The Alliance got a major boost early on when it received funding from Maddie's Fund, a private family foundation. Now the Alliance has an operating budget of about \$3 million, with funding coming from individuals, corporations and foundations.

While the nonprofit world doesn't provide the same paycheck as private practice on Wall Street, Hoffman said she would like to stay focused on animal shelter and rescue work for the rest of her career. "At the end of the day, do you want to die saying I have the most stuff, or do you want to die doing something you really care about?" she said. Hoffman, who is the unofficial general counsel at the Alliance, said she is grateful for her law firm background. "The Alliance would not exist but for my legal background—I'm firmly convinced of that."

She lives in the West Village with two dogs and four cats, all shelter animals.

**Q: How did you get involved in animal shelter and rescue issues?**

**A:** I've had companion animals all my life. In 1990, when I helped to create the Animal Law Committee of the New York City Bar, I became involved in a range of animals issues in a more structured way, and in 2000, I moderated the Annual Conference on Animal Sheltering in the United States at the bar. It was through my work with the Animal Law Committee that my focus turned to animal shelter and rescue issues in New York City. The confluence of several important factors at the time crystallized my decision to become more involved. The creation of Maddie's Fund in 1999; the election in 2001 of a new mayor who is a strong proponent of public-private partnerships; and the positive response we (the animal law committee) received from his administration to suggestions we set forth in a memo to the new administration, all came together to signal to me that it was the time to make something big happen. And at the time I had my own practice, which gave me the flexibility to devote time to the endeavor.

**Q: How did the organization form?**

**A:** When Michael Bloomberg began his first term as mayor of New York City in 2002, the animal law committee sent a memorandum to the new administration suggesting solutions to some of the issues facing New York City's animals, and particularly the animals at NYC Animal Care & Control (AC&C). I received a call from the deputy mayor for operations lead counsel, Terri Matthews, expressing interest in our proposed public/private partnership. The administration was very receptive to the idea of a community collaboration and the potential influx of millions of dollars from Maddie's Fund to help New York City reduce euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals at AC&C. And so it became apparent that we needed to establish a not-for-profit organization, apply for the Maddie's Fund grant and then to manage the funds and initiatives needed to accomplish the goal.

**Q: Why did you decide to leave private practice and lead the Alliance?**

**A:** Rich Avanzino, president of Maddie's Fund, wanted to know who would lead the organization that would receive a very large Maddie's Fund grant—at the time, the largest grant ever made to an animal welfare organization. I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to lead the effort.

**Q: Other attorneys grow up with animals and then donate or volunteer for animal rights. What made your experience so different as to dedicate your career to this?**

**A:** Lawyers contribute to animal welfare in many ways—serving on an animal law committee, running a practice devoted to animal law, getting their firms to take on animal issues as a pro bono client, or teaching animal law classes. For me, it was a natural step, after serving on the animal law committee for a dozen years, to run a not-for-profit, which was something I'd always wanted to do.

**Q: What does the Alliance do on a daily basis to accomplish its goals?**

**A:** The Alliance provides resources and services to the rescue community, which includes approximately 150 rescue groups and brick-and-mortar shelters in and around New York City, and also to the feral cat caretaker community. Those are individuals and groups that spay or neuter and care for our "community cats" who live outdoors throughout the five boroughs. We provide a range of resources and services to these groups and individuals to help them save lives. One example is our Wheels of Hope transport fleet, which includes five transport vans on the road seven days a week, 365 days a year, moving animals to safe havens. Because transportation is a challenge for most people who do rescue in New York City, we provide transport for their animals at no charge. Everyday we're moving animals out of AC&C shelters and delivering them to rescue groups that will find them homes. But transport is only one of the services we provide. The Alliance also provides adoption support through events and publicity; training for the groups to help them function more efficiently and professionally; and numerous other programs.

**Q: What is your job at the Alliance and how many people do you oversee?**

**A:** I'm the president of the Mayor's Alliance, and I manage a staff of 10. As president, I develop our strategic direction and ensure that our programs run efficiently and that we have the resources we need to carry out our mission. I'm also the primary spokesperson for the Alliance in the media.

**Q: What are the issues most important to the Alliance?**

**A:** Our strategic plan outlines the four core objectives that define our mission and illustrate the issues that are our primary focus. Those four objectives are to increase pet adoptions; decrease animal homelessness through spay/neuter, microchipping, dog licensing, and other aspects of responsible pet ownership; increase awareness about the shelters and rescue groups and the animals in their care; and to increase capacity of our shelters and rescues through strength training and grants. All of our programs focus on one or more of these objectives.

**Q: What animal shelter and rescue policies are you advocating for?**

**A:** We've created a replicable model of collaboration in New York City, and to that end, I speak at conferences, meetings and webinars around the country to advocate for collaboration among community partners. I always try to drive home the importance of developing a strategic plan as a road map, and to adjust that plan as circumstances change, and to remain focused on the goals that are attainable. One particular program I often speak about is our NYC Feral Cat Initiative, which focuses on solving NYC's feral "community" cat overpopulation crisis through the humane, non-lethal method of trap-neuter-return (TNR). TNR is the only proven effective method of managing community cat populations and reducing their numbers over time. Most communities across the country have an abundance of community cats, and if they aren't taking steps to manage them through TNR, they'll never solve their animal overpopulation problem.

**Q: Are the group's issues difficult to solve or address, due to any controversy or emotion tied into the discussion? What kind of opposition have you faced?**

**A:** Issues around animal welfare often are laced with diverse opinions, and emotions run high because we're talking about the welfare of living beings. But while the people doing this work often view the solutions differently, they can find common ground and work together toward the same end. The key to a successful collaboration is having processes and procedures in place that guide the groups in how they work together. The groups that participate in the Mayor's Alliance are doing it because they want to, and they understand the importance of adhering to certain guidelines. Of course, anything new can generate opposition, but over the years our participating organizations have witnessed, and have shared in, our success, and that has helped to mitigate friction among the groups.

**Q: How much contact do you have with animals in your daily job?**

**A:** While the Mayor's Alliance is not a shelter, we touch animals every day, seven days a week. We're moving animals out of AC&C shelters through our Wheels of Hope transport program. We're regularly staging adoption events and microchipping events; bringing animals before the public at PR and media events. And we have three beautiful cats who we care for at our office and provide us with a daily dose of reality.

**Q: How do your legal background and skills translate to this position?**

**A:** You always use the skills you learn as a lawyer. You analyze. You figure out options. You problem solve. You negotiate. All of these skills come into play in the animal welfare arena. One of the most important strengths I brought with me into this work is a resistance to intimidation—it's hard to intimidate a lawyer! And because I worked at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett and am a member of the animal law committee of the New York City Bar, I can call upon my legal colleagues for assistance with legal issues.

**Q: How does the Alliance get funding?**

**A:** Between 2005 and 2011, we derived our primary funding from Maddie's Fund, with additional support from the ASPCA, one of the Alliance's founding members and a strong on-going supporter of our work. While we have always relied upon support from individuals, corporations and foundations, their contribution has become increasingly critical in preserving the continuity of our programs and services, and in expanding these programs to achieve even greater impacts in our now 10th year of operation. As we enter into the end-of-year giving season, we are particularly cognizant of the importance of individual donations in helping us find countless animals a home for the holidays. We also continually seek out new sources of funding. Today we are relying upon new channels of support from the public, including the sale of Broadway Barks calendars and our Alliance-branded Alex and Ani paw print bangles. Our fundraising outreach focuses on those programs which are the most effective in saving animals' lives, including our Wheels of Hope transport program and our Picasso Boarding and Medical Fund, which provides for lifesaving medical treatment for sick and injured animals transferred from AC&C to partner groups.

**Q: Is the city government or mayor's office involved or contributing? How did the group get its name?**

**A:** The Mayor's Alliance grew out of a memorandum from the animal law committee to newly elected Mayor Bloomberg. When it became apparent that we needed to establish a not-for-profit organization to manage the work ahead of us and the significant funding we would receive from Maddie's Fund, I looked to Simpson Thacher & Bartlett to set up the non-profit. The name "Mayor's Alliance" cemented our relationship with the Mayor's office and the city of New York.

While the Mayor's Alliance isn't a city-funded agency, nor is it associated with any specific mayor (just as the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition isn't tied to any specific U.S. president), the name has helped us to work effectively with other city agencies. Since we are a not-for-profit and we rely upon donations from the public and private funding, the name has been somewhat of a double-edged sword when we are mistaken for a city-funded entity. On the other hand, having "Mayor's" in our name has been useful in opening doors for us that otherwise might not have been opened.

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