

Doing Ferrets Proud

The City of Roses played host to the 2007 International Ferret Congress symposium.

By Marylou Zarbock

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"It's falling out of my ears. There's just so much!" At the close of the International Ferret symposium in Portland, Oregon, June 2007, Stacey Lamb of Kansas experienced a bit of information overload, but in a good way. And I know exactly how she feels.

I also attended the three-day event, which evolved into a marathon of learning, socializing, fundraising and shopping for ferret items. Lamb told me she got a hand cramp taking notes, and she also got to meet someone she previously knew only through cards they exchanged as part of an ongoing program that raises money for Support Our Shelters.

What is Support Our Shelters? Judith White, one of the founders of the charity, gave a talk at the symposium to explain how this nonprofit organization collects money to benefit ferret shelters. White was one of 13 speakers who shared knowledge about various organizations or fields of expertise. The talks ranged from how to help ferrets survive disasters by Susan Thiel of F.E.R.R.E.T. to dealing with grief by Bruce Williams, DVM, DACVP, to emerging ferret diseases by Katrina Ramsell, Ph.D., DVM, and much more.

It's All About The 411

Keeping up-to-date on information is the main concern for Donna Spirito of The Educated Ferret in Massachusetts. "We can learn here and share back home." This was the third symposium for Spirito. She purchased CDs of the talks from the last event to share with her veterinarian, who was unable to take time off to attend.

Lavon Grahn works at a veterinary hospital in the area that encourages its employees to continue learning about animal health. Grahn took them up on this and attended last year's American Ferret Association's symposium and then this symposium. She particularly enjoyed the talks at this event by Bob Church, Bob Wagner, VMD, and Susan Brown, DVM.

Kathy Fritz of the Ferret Nook Shelter/Adoption Center in Cambridge, Wis., led an evening workshop on Friday that taught how to test a ferret's blood glucose level at home. Why worry about blood glucose? Dr. Williams said it's possibly the most important blood test for ferrets.

The Fun Stuff

Information and learning are a big part of what the symposium is all about, but attendees enjoyed other bonuses. Raffles for great ferret products occurred on Friday and Saturday. During breaks we visited with others or perused the vendor tables. Many items caught the eye: ferret bedding, food, books, bumper stickers, jewelry and so much more.

Special events included a brief fashion show displaying the bridal outfits for the upcoming "wedding" of a ferret in California to a ferret in Colorado. A ferret emergency also occurred in the form of a humorous skit put on by members of the International Ferret Congress. During the banquet on Saturday evening, a human-sized ferret made a special appearance.

After the banquet came the celebrity auction. Every speaker is asked to donate an item to be auctioned off to raise money for ferret shelters. On Friday, speaker Joel Vanderbush woke up everyone after lunch with a rousing talk featuring live ferrets. His topic? How to conduct successful educational talks with ferrets. He soon took control of the microphone as the auctioneer on Saturday, and his outrageous comments and dramatic delivery got almost everyone laughing and bidding at the same time. More than \$2,700 was raised that night, but that's only part of the story.

Since the Atlanta symposium, it's become a bit of a tradition to have an unofficial trip to the local zoo after the last talk on Sunday. So, in addition to learning, socializing, fundraising and shopping, attendees saw some local sights.

Helping Hands

Together, attendees generated more than \$4,000 through just some of the fundraising events: Renée Downs organized a shelter dinner the evening before the symposium that raised \$500, which goes to two local ferret shelters; passing a



collection can during Judith White's talk about SOS raised \$300 for that charity; and an auction of several items to benefit black-footed ferret recovery raised more than \$1,000.

Black-footed ferrets are the only ferrets native to North America and are fighting to come back from the brink of extinction. Travis Livieri regaled us with the story of these comeback kids, the wild cousins to our pet ferrets. Unfortunately, proposed changes to government policy now threaten their reintroduction to the wild.

The story of the black-footed ferrets touches the hearts of everyone who hears it. Joan Orr, a clicker training expert who gave a fascinating talk (with videos) demonstrating clicker training on ferrets, horses, cats, rabbits and dogs, was moved to do something. She announced during her talk, which followed Livieri's, that she would donate \$5 to black-footed ferret recovery efforts from every sale of her Clicker Puppy DVD.

Memorials & Honors

At the start of the symposium, a memoriam honored three people in the ferret community whose lives ended too soon: Rebecca McFarlane, Mike Janke and Kym Zorn.

The IFC gives out special achievement awards at every event. This year, the awards went to Judy Cooke, Mike Janke and Katrina Ramsell, Ph.D., DVM.

A Special Bond

The days and nights were packed with things to do. And those who attended made the most of it. I think Mark Fitzgerald of Deb's Ferret Rescue and Boarding in Michigan might have hit on the reason why. "You get in your own little world. [It's good] to meet so many different people with the same passion as you."