We’re all aware of the overpopulation of pets, plus with the state of the economy right now, it’s obvious that people are in need of help. The HSUS has a good reputation, so it was a way to reach out to the community with a strong organization and really do some good.

—Stephen Owen, associate pastor of Shallow Well United Church of Christ in Sanford, N.C., which cohosted an October 2010 vaccine clinic and spay/neuter voucher distribution
Pioneering Spay/Neuter in Haiti and Bhutan

At first, some of the Haitians were skeptical. Like most veterinarians in developing nations, they’d been trained to treat agricultural animals, not sterilize dogs. And while eager to learn new skills, they worried that the knowledge would be worthless when the Westerners left and they wouldn’t have the necessary supplies to perform the surgeries.

Dispelling such fears was just one of the challenges Humane Society International faced in 2010—the first year of an ambitious animal welfare initiative in a country that, even before the January earthquake, had not a single animal shelter, animal protection group, or low-cost veterinary clinic. HSI teams spent months assessing the situation, meeting with government officials and other NGOs, and mapping out a multiyear project with long-term sustainability.

In partnership with Best Friends Animal Society, HSI laid the groundwork for the January 2011 opening of the Haiti Animal Care and Welfare Center, which includes a veterinary hospital, community workshop space, and veterinary training center. And more than 30 Haitian vets received hands-on training in spay/neuter surgeries and companion animal care—setting the stage for high-volume sterilization and vaccination clinics for street dogs and companion clinics for working equines throughout the island.

It’s a comprehensive, longsighted approach to improving animal welfare in developing nations. In the kingdom of Bhutan, HSI is leading the first-ever national spay/neuter initiative. By the end of 2010, the program had sterilized and vaccinated nearly 17,000 dogs, and it had begun training local veterinary professionals and others in the skills needed to keep the work going in the years to come.

“Our staff are reaching into every corner,” says Sunil Chawla, HSI’s lead veterinarian in Bhutan, describing the thrill of visiting a remote area and finding a dog with the telltale notched ear borne by beneficiaries of HSI’s spay/neuter program. “They are doing very hard work.”

The HSI street dog program caught the attention of animal lovers and government officials in other nations with large street dog populations. In November, the mayor of Cebu City in the Philippines signed an agreement with HSI to launch a two-year catch-neuter-release program for street dogs; other Philippine cities have expressed interest in doing the same.

HSI has also helped address cultural mindsets that affect animal welfare. In Cuenca, Ecuador, we cosponsored the first adoption fair for ARCA (Activism, Rescue, and Consience for Animals)—promoting shelter pets in a country where adoptions aren’t common. Two cats and 32 dogs found new homes at the event, which attracted more than 200 people.

In Haiti, the trickle-down effect on cultural attitudes is already apparent. “Now minds are changing,” says HSI’s lead veterinarian in Haiti. “People like Debbie Hood, executive director of the Tupelo-Lee Humane Society in Mississippi, where about 72 percent of the animals are euthanized—close to the average for shelters across the state. “I can’t look in their eyes and not do something,” says Hood. “Maybe not today, but in the long run, we’ll eventually save a lot of lives.”

In Tupelo, Miss., more than 300 pets received rabies vaccines and free bags of food.
Yes, They Had Some Chihuahuas: “When I first got him, they were calling him Dr. Death because he just looked so bad,” says Erin Long-Scott, who adopted the dog now known as Lovie. One of 158 animals removed from substandard conditions by The HSUS and Kern County Animal Control in California, the Chihuahua’s teeth The SPCA is one of 100-plus care for victims of large cruelty cases investigated by The HSUS and law enforcement agencies. Partners like the Sacramento SPCA join a “collaborative effort that’s key to improving the lives of animals in our community,” says executive director Rick Johnson. Today, Lovie loves to chew on oranges in Long-Scott’s yard. What happens when you play a country song backward? Your wife comes for a warm-air “massage.” His jaw’s back, your truck gets fixed, and a little crooked, but he smiles a lot. Your lost dog comes home. It’s an old joke, but it was in that spirit of reversing misfortune that mecca of Nashville, Tenn.—only a week after the city experienced heavy flooding that left the original conference site 14 feet under water. HSUS conference planners and local partners kicked into high gear, relocating the entire meeting—which … another hotel with less than a week to spare. More than 1,000 animal shelter and rescue staff and volunteers came to learn, network, and get inspired.

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A Roadmap for Shelters: Rural or urban, large or small, government-funded or private nonprofit, animal shelters face unique challenges. Everything from cage-cleaning protocols to building design to public relations ultimately impacts a shelter’s animals and its employees. To help shelters reach their highest potential, The HSUS’s Shelter Services program provides guidance, training, and on-site assessments, bringing the latest research and progressive solutions to shelters across the country. “I’m still astonished by all we learned,” says Karen Stimpson, executive director of the Coastal Humane Society in Maine, which received an on-site evaluation in 2010. Stimpson and her staff have already implemented many of the HSUS team’s recommendations—with noticeable results. Best of all, Stimpson says, her organization now has a five-year roadmap and HSUS experts to advise them. “Whatever’s coming our way, we’ve got the wisdom behind the report and follow-up and guidance if we need it.”

Pen Pals: When a temporary shelter in Gonzalez, La., filled to capacity with animals rescued from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Dixon Correctional Institute officials offered to help. Soon, hundreds of animals were on their way to a converted dairy barn on prison grounds, where inmates walked dogs and even played frisbee. “A lot of guys really enjoyed it,” says warden Steve Rader. “They said, ‘If you ever get dogs, I want to work with them again!'” Now, thanks to a $600,000 HSUS grant and help from the Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine, the prison is the site of an emergency evacuation facility and animal shelter for East Feliciana parish strays. Providing training for prisoners as well as a refuge for homeless pets in a parish that previously didn’t have a shelter, the program reflects The HSUS’s ongoing commitment to assist pet owners in post-disaster recovery.

Foul-Weather Friends: Long engaged in post-Katrina rebuilding in the Gulf Coast, The HSUS was there to help when the Deepwater Horizon oil spill drove out-of-work locals to surrender more animals to area shelters. “Every room had dogs in it, kennels on top of each other. You could tell they were just struggling to get any dogs out,” recalls The HSUS’s Sarah Barnett, who in June helped transport animals from two Louisiana shelters to Washington, D.C., groups. “Knowing they’re going to a good place and a safe place, it took a load off the whole staff,” said a relieved Beth Brewster, director of the St. Bernard Parish Animal Shelter. Brewster’s shelter itself is a post-Katrina project come to fruition. Paid for with FEMA funds, insurance proceeds, and a $250,000 grant and other in-kind assistance from The HSUS, the new facility is “paradise,” says Brewster—easier to clean, pleasant for staff and visitors, and, most important, more comfortable for the animals.

Transforming Veterinary Medicine: Ontario Veterinary School student Erika Sullivan was disturbed that few classmates had chosen an ethical alternative to the school’s traditional surgical training on live animals who are later euthanized. As a student member of the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, Sullivan knew simulators, cadavers, and beneficial procedures such as spay/neuter are just as effective and are embraced by many U.S. veterinary schools. After graduating in 2005, she continued to return to her alma mater to promote alternative training. Now a professional HSVMA member, Sullivan helped persuade her school to eliminate terminal surgeries in 2010. Ending terminal surgeries is just one way that HSVMA helps animals through action, advocacy, and education. In 2010, members rallied for two crucial ballot campaigns—a puppy mill initiative in Missouri and Ohio’s humane farm initiative—and worked to ban the devocalization of dogs in Massachusetts. HSVMA Field Services teams also provided $1.3 million in free veterinary care to more than 8,000 companion animals and equines in rural and underserved areas here and abroad.

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White skulls and decaying bodies dotted the terrain, while the trees offered another haunting reminder of just how bad things had gotten on this decrepit Texas farm. The horses were so starved, so desperate, they had taken to chewing the bark off the trunks.

In December, The HSUS stepped in and helped authorities seize 43 horses from the property—one of several major rescues in 2010. More than 20 horses were placed in new homes, while 14 were sent to foster trainers and five to The HSUS’s new Doris Day Horse Rescue and Adoption Center in east Texas. The latter were expected to attend the center’s grand opening this May to participate in a “rescue makeover,” showing off just how far they’ve come.

“That is the model that we’re seeking to perpetuate, that these horses aren’t old, broken down, worthless animals,” says Stacy Segal, equine cruelty specialist with The HSUS. “They just need the time and the knowledge to become good equine citizens and good partners for people.”

The HSUS helped dozens of other horses find second chances in 2010. In May, a tractor-trailer transporting 30 horses to slaughter overturned in Oklahoma when the driver fell asleep. HSUS Oklahoma state director Cynthia Armstrong described the scene: “We had Good Samaritan citizens who saw the crash, called their friends, got halters, corralled the horses safely, and got them off the highway until authorities arrived.” The HSUS and Blaze’s Tribute Equine Rescue negotiated custody of the 17 survivors, later fostered by Blaze’s board member Desiree Wailing on her Calumet farm. On the night of the spring equinox, a mare named Catori, who was pregnant at the time of the accident, gave birth. Named for the “super-moon” blazing in the sky that night, Moongruck serves as “a symbol of hope and rebirth and the survival of all of these horses,” Armstrong says.

Also last year, The HSUS assisted the Cabell-Wayne Animal Shelter with the rescue of 49 starving and neglected horses, mules, and donkeys from a West Virginia property. Seven months later, 114 horses were seized from the overrun Arkansas property of a horse trader and auctioneer. The HSUS and ASPCA devoted many resources to caring for the rescued horses at an abandoned livestock auction, as they awaited a final court disposition with hopes of taking custody and holding an adoption fair. A rancher later provided temporary sanctuary throughout the legal process.

Beyond rescues and adoptions, The HSUS has found other ways to help horses, like teaming with the American Competitive Trail Horse Association for a weekend of benefit trail rides around the U.S. The group raised $70,000 from the event, then donated the money to The HSUS, which in turn awarded grants to horse rescue organizations.