

Holly Thoms speaks out against puppy mills, gas chambers, Class B dealers and more.



HOLLY THOMS
FOUNDER, VOICELESS-MI
LANSING, MICHIGAN

Keeping a Cap on Kittens

In 2009, Holly Thoms founded Voiceless-MI (voiceless-mi.org), an organization that operates foster care and low-cost spay/neuter programs and that promotes animal-friendly state legislation. In 2014, the organization helped to spay/neuter 1,107 animals, helping to keep “The Mitten State” from becoming the kitten state.

Beyond Shelter Walls

Using some of the community engagement strategies from the HSUS Pets for Life program, Voiceless-MI helps low-income Michiganders keep their pets healthy and out of shelters. Thoms first learned about Pets for Life in 2012 at Animal Care Expo, an annual HSUS conference. “I was really inspired by some of the things that I saw and learned, and I incorporated some of those into my program.”

Joining Forces

Thoms created the website michigandersforshelterpets.org as a central resource on issues affecting Michigan’s unowned pets. There, animal lovers can learn about current issues and how they can help.

+ LEARN MORE about HSUS efforts to combat gas chambers at humanesociety.org/gaschambers.

LOUD AND CLEAR

MICHIGAN ADVOCATE GIVES ANIMALS A VOICE // BY KELLY HUEGEL

WHEN HOLLY THOMS learned that her local animal shelter was going to start euthanizing dogs because it didn’t have the staffing to care for them, she leaped into action. “I grabbed one of my friends and went down there and said, ‘We’re gonna clean up poop, you know—try and help out.’” That was more than 15 years ago, but Thoms’ commitment to animals hasn’t flagged.

She first dove into legislative issues when she discovered that the shelter where she volunteered was selling animals to a Class B dealer—someone who acquires pets from random sources, such as free-to-good-home ads, and sells them for research. Thoms, who lives near Lansing, joined with fellow animal advocates, including HSUS Michigan senior state director Jill Fritz, and took the issue to the County Council.

“We had a big fight that lasted quite a few years,” says Thoms. Her group once rallied enough supporters to keep the council up until midnight. Finally, in 2003,

the council voted to prohibit the animal control department from selling to Class B dealers.

Most recently, Thoms has lobbied to remove gas chambers from the four counties in the state where shelters still have them. Fewer than a dozen states are known to have active chambers—a method of euthanasia that The HSUS considers inhumane because it can’t produce a pain- and stress-free death in a shelter setting.

Thoms, Fritz and other advocates have been backing legislation known as Grant’s Bill, which would remove the state’s remaining gas chambers and require euthanasia by injection. Though it received unanimous support from the state Senate in 2013, the bill stalled in the House. Thoms is now working to get it passed in the 2015-2016 legislative session.

“Holly has incredible determination and perseverance,” says Fritz. “No matter how many frustrating roadblocks we come up against, she just keeps fighting.”

