



**Sherry DeBoer
by Kit Paraventi**

"This initiative shows how the ballot process can be abused by the idle rich. A wealthy heiress wants to foist her pet project...on the rest of California. Get a life."

The words sizzled from the California ballot materials booklet like a freshly inflicted brand, a distinctly personal scorcher tucked amid pages of careful rhetoric. For more than 22 million state voters, it was the first round in a blustering Libertarian party rebuttal against Proposition 6, the initiative to criminalize the slaughter of California's horses.

Upon reading it, Sherry DeBoer-the target of the remark-smiled, rolled her eyes, and groaned like a victim of a bad pun at the office picnic. "Oh, come on," she laughed. If they were going to take a shot at me, you would think that they'd have done better than that!"

The outspoken former actress has always been an enigma to her opponents. The veteran California lobbyist is a disarming meld of toughness and sensitivity. She lists "Gladiator as her occupation and "God" as her employer on campaign contribution cards. She believes in faith, miracles, uncompromising legislation, and a well-maintained reserve of key political friendships. Hailed by California State Senator Bill Lockyer as "an incredibly effective legislative force," she has dedicated herself to making miracles come true for animals.

DeBoer founded the Animal Health and Safety Association in 1990, a coalition dedicated to humane legislative reform on the state level. She successfully lobbied for a bill to establish humane standards for puppies and kittens in "pet" stores, and another to criminalize the marketing of stolen animals for any commercial purpose, including research. She reversed a centuries-old law that allowed horses less than two years old to be raced in California, and founded Political Animals, which has grown into the largest political action committee for animal advocacy in the state.

The Save the Horses California voter initiative, co-sponsored by DeBoer, California Equine Council founder Cathleen Doyle, and philanthropist Sidne J. Long, marks the first attempt in U.S. history to ban the slaughter of horses for human consumption. By

soliciting the support of a diverse group of politicians, celebrities, and organizations, the initiatives sponsors hoped to create a blue print for successful initiatives in other states.

Born in Hawaii, DeBoer acquired rank and privilege as an heiress to the Long's Drug Store fortune. As she grew into adulthood, she found herself lured further and further from the social whirlwind. "I had nothing to show for the years of dating and pretty dressing," she says. She recalled a favorite adage of her stepfather, Joe Long, who said, "The real joy is in the giving, not the getting." In 1989, reeling from a failed marriage, she decided to take an entire year and do nothing but give.

Helping animals was an obvious choice. Hers was a family that cherished and nurtured its animals, and never hesitated to rescue a few more when the opportunity arose. Her involvement in animal rescue in California had already led to a stint as a nurse in a wildlife hospital. But she longed to strike deeper and uproot cruelty at its social and legal roots. She resolved to take California's political citadel by storm.

DeBoer soon realized that her voter's-eye view of the legislative process had not prepared her for the complexities of lawmaking. She enrolled in the state humane and police academies, and was certified as a state humane officer in 1990. She hired private trainers to school her in the rudiments of lobbying and intraparty politics. Watching the incessant parade of new laws convinced her that the California legislature was not the age-old immovable rock that had always stymied animal advocates, but was supple clay that could be molded into miracles.

"Like other animal protection people, I entered that arena with the assumption that moral correctness has power," she says. She soon learned that the guiding compass of legislators is, by necessity, their own re-election. "Simply put," she says, "legislators are powerless to help you if you it will result in their defeat at the polls."

She discovered that the currency of the state capitol is campaign assistance-key facts that friendly legislators could parlay into endorsements, votes, campaign contributions, and favorable PR. The lesson was driven home one day during deliberations on her "pet shop" reform bill. A staffer she'd befriended passed along results of a freshly compiled government study that documented horrendous store conditions. With the study in hand, she was able to swing the final votes needed to get the bill passed.

"The legislature is no place for amateurs, no matter how enthusiastic or well-intentioned," DeBoer says. If you want to help the animals, take your job seriously. Do the research, learn the ropes, hire a professional lobbyist, and find a way to be of service to your friends and a problem to their opponents. Otherwise, you're just not doing it right.