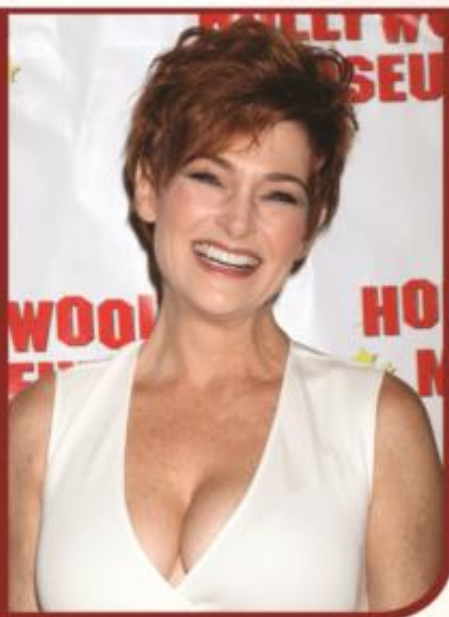


ANIMALS' BEST FRIEND: CAROLYN HENNESSY

By Denny Patterson

Carolyn Hennesy may be known for her roles as Rosalyn Harris in *True Blood* and Diane Miller in *General Hospital*, but at the beginning of this year, she became the spokesperson of Fort Lauderdale's The Pet Project. Founded in 2002, the Pet Project was originally established to assist individuals living with HIV/AIDS. With five years of experience and a successful track record, the organization expanded its services to include the terminally ill, elderly, and disabled. Now, with Hennesy on their side, her mission is to raise awareness of the Pet Project and help it accomplish even more. OutClique received the pleasure of chatting with Hennesy about her involvement and her staunch animal advocacy. For more information, donations, and volunteer services, go to www.ThePetProjectFL.org.



Tell me a little bit more about how you got involved with the Pet Project.

My friend and producer Srdjan Stakic knows Paul Gallucio, the organization's chair. They are good friends. Srdjan knows my background in animal advocacy and he's produced several things and happened to be producing a film I was doing for a month in Atlanta. He came up to me and asked if I would please consider doing a voiceover PSA for the Pet Project and I said yes in a heartbeat. So, I recorded it for them and sent it off and then when I went back to Atlanta, as a thank you, they asked if I would like to come down and see what they do. So, my flight was rerouted and I spent the evening with everyone from the Pet Project and was given a full tour. All the bells and whistles. I had such a wonderful time and was so impressed. I was also stunned by the fact that there is nothing else like this around the country. My question is, why not?

When I was first told about the Pet Project, I thought it was an organization that pairs pets with either sick or handicapped people for companionship, but the overall goal is to help people not be separated from their pets, right?

Yes, the major benefit is that it allows individuals who love their pets, who have fallen on financial hard times, to stay with their pets. For many people, pets are family. Sometimes their only family. The idea of being separated from their dog or cat or turtle or bird is heartbreaking. The Pet Project enables them to stay together. That's the beat all end all. They will also feed your pet and help with shots and required vet care in a timely fashion for little or no cost. They really go the extra mile. Of course, there are various fundraisers that help as well. You can shop for cool and groovy stuff and know that the cost of your purchase will be going straight to helping someone keep their four-legged friend. If you are in need and are about to be separated from your pet, you go there and they will welcome you with open arms and open bags of food.

Why did you accept to help out?

Because it is physically impossible for me to say no to an animal. My brain does not work that way. I am all about organizations that give a voice to the voiceless. Even small children have tiny voices, but animals have nothing. They only have one brain that causes

crying and barking. And the Pet Project is such a worthy cause. I'm sitting here right now looking at my three dogs and I just lost one of my two cats. They are family to me. They are some of the best aspects of my life and the idea that they can be taken away from me is awful. I am all about supporting the Pet Project. This is another example on how important animals are in our life.

So, you've been a lifelong animal advocate your entire life.

Yes, but I really made it an adjunct passion in my life for the past 11 years.

Overall, how beneficial has the Pet Project been?

It's huge! While I was there, I saw them go through sacks and sacks of food. Four individual parties within an hour came on camera for me for my podcast, Animal Magnetism, and just broke down and talked about how they wouldn't be able to keep their pets if the Pet Project wasn't there. Business is booming.

The Pet Project is currently only in Florida?

Yes! Only in Fort Lauderdale. It could and should be franchised everywhere. If there is a city that has even one cat or dog living in it, I would like to see the Pet Project there.

What other animal advocacy groups are you involved in?

I'm the ambassador for American Humane. I am the ambassador and spokesperson for the Los Angeles Zoo and Botanical Gardens. I participated in a documentary called The Elephant Trainer in the Room that I went to Thailand and Cambodia for. I am a proponent for the Georgia Aquarium and Seaworld. I went down to speak to the California Coastal Commission on behalf of Seaworld's Blue World project, but unfortunately, the project was shut down due to the ignorance of the California Coastal Commission. So, I am involved with all of that, and I do advocacy through my podcast, Animal Magnetism. You can listen to that every other Sunday at

www.ubnradio.com.

Are you involved with any advocacy groups outside of animals?

I help with children and veterans. I may not be as involved with those groups, but if you ask me to come and speak, I will in a heartbeat. But my primary focus at this particular time is animals.

I know you mentioned it a couple times before, but go ahead and tell me more about your podcast, Animal Magnetism.

When I came home from Thailand and Cambodia, I was so despondent by what I saw over there. You don't see the elephants beaten, but you see the trainers sitting on top of an elephant's neck and all the emphasis is in their hands. They will tap behind an elephant's ear, which is the most sensitive spot on their body. You see these elephants living in a state of threat. Up the road, about a mile, is the Elephant Nature Park where you see these animals living in bliss. They are washed, fed, and loved. It's the complete polar opposite from what you see at those camps. So, when I got home, I was really depressed. I had to channel this into a force. I had to do something beneficial, so the idea of a media show was born and I have had amazing people on it. From people at the Georgia Aquarium to Jack Hanna, people all over the world calling in. It's been just wonderful. Usually it's live and in studio and goes out every two weeks on Sunday at 7:00. It's been the first baby steps to persuading people to change their hearts and minds about why we need modern zoos and aquariums. I feel this show is helping me to help people change their way of thinking about animals, exotic to domestic. Once animals go, we do. They don't need us. We need them.

Fantastic. Lastly, how important is it to be involved?

If you're not involved, then you're taking up space [laughs]. So, get involved, stay involved, pick a project, and pick a passion. As long as it doesn't hurt anyone or anything. Make your life count for something enormous.