

Wayne Pacelle:

The Humane Society's Italian-American voice for animal protection

By Monica Soladay



Photo courtesy of the Humane Society of the United States.

Since 2004, Pacelle has served as CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, expanding its focus and increasing lobbying efforts for state and federal animal protection laws. But his compassion for animals is partly rooted in lessons he learned from his Italian-American family.

Growing up in New Haven, Connecticut, Wayne Pacelle always enjoyed eating his Italian grandmother's homemade sausage and meatballs at family gatherings. But while studying at Yale University in the late 1980s, he decided to eliminate meat and dairy products from his diet out of concern for the treatment of animals. The choice was a "bit of a shock" for his grandmother, but Pacelle says she soon began crafting vegetarian dishes instead.

Although an adjustment, the change in diet "was not a hardship," says Pacelle, who reminisced that his grandmother was equally adept at making a meat-free, homemade pizza. "She always had a garden – a very wonderful garden in the back of her home."

For Pacelle, such concern for animals has evolved from a dietary choice to a career. At 46, he is president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, a national organization with nearly 10 million members that works in the U.S. and abroad

to protect animals through education, advocacy, investigating cruelty, and working to enforce existing laws.

"A lot of people get hung up on the terminology of animal rights," Pacelle says. "I really think about it in terms of human responsibility. I recognize that people have power over animals and we need to use that power for good and not take advantage of the less powerful to advance selfish ends such as profit or entertainment."

A NEW DIRECTION

Founded in 1954, the Humane Society of the United States has long worked to promote the protection of animals. But, since taking its reins in 2004 after nearly 10 years as its chief lobbyist and spokesman, Pacelle has expanded the group's focus to include the humane treatment of all animals, not just the cats and dogs for which the Humane Society ►