



Michele Lazarow with Allegra

PHOTO BY KATIA MEDINA

Electing to help animals

COMMISSIONER MICHELE LAZAROW PUTS ANIMALS FIRST IN HER LIFE AND ON THE DOCKET

By Denise LeBeau

THE CREDO “POLITICS IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT” is at the heart of Michele Lazarow’s path to becoming an elected official. The businesswoman from Hallandale Beach, Florida, found her way into politics quite accidentally. It began in a pet store.

In 2004, Michele walked into a local pet store and asked if the dogs there were from puppy mills. As a lifelong pet lover, she didn’t want to support the cruel practices of the puppy mill industry. She was told the puppies certainly weren’t from puppy mills; they were from USDA-certified breeders. Confused by this, she went home and

did some research on what that meant, learning that in reality, most puppy mills are licensed by the USDA. It was easy to see how the average customer could be duped into unknowingly supporting puppy mills.

Taking action

Unable to get the experience out of her mind, Michele decided to take action by attempting to pass a pet sale ban in Hallandale Beach pet stores — replacing mill-supplied dogs with adoptable pets from shelters. “It seemed like a no-brainer,” Michele says. “Pet stores (that sell milled pets) are a plague on any community. They bring more sick animals into the area, while local animal shelters are filled.”

In the months of working with the public and lawmakers, Michele had an epiphany. She realized she could be an agent for sustainable change. She saw firsthand how the pet trade hired lobbyists to fight any

“As an animal advocate, I know that putting an additional title in front of my name could effect change for the animals on a municipal and state level.”

legislation that would regulate the puppy mill industry. So she decided to use her newfound knowledge to help more animals, constituents and communities by running for city commissioner of Hallandale Beach. Michele not only got a pet sale ban on the books, she also won the commissioner seat.

Politics for puppies

“As an animal advocate, I know that putting an additional title in front of my name could effect change for the animals on a municipal and state level,” Michele says. Of the 30 municipalities in south Florida, more than half now have pet sale bans, thanks to her tireless work. Michele has had the support of Best Friends along the way. Elizabeth Oreck, manager of Best Friends’ puppy mill initiatives, says, “It has been so inspiring to work with Michele to help make Florida a more humane state. She really exemplifies how one person’s dedication can create widespread, positive change for animals.”

Michele is constantly reaching out to other commissioners to give them the tools to help get pet sale bans enacted, and Florida now is one of the forerunners in passing those humane laws. The pet sale bans aren’t just about stopping puppy mills, however; they’re also about consumer protection and encouraging adoption from shelters. “Protecting our residents and preventing them from spending a lot of money on an animal who will most likely have expensive medical issues is important,” Michele says. “(Pet sale bans) also give the shelters an opportunity to adopt out more dogs.”

As Michele looks toward the future, she is proud to serve all her constituents, including those who are the most vulnerable — the animals. She will continue to use legislation to help make the world a better place for people and pets alike. 🐾

To learn more about helping animals in your community through legislation:
bestfriends.org/resources/animal-advocacy | bestfriends.org/action