

**Report on NAIA Conference,
“Helping Communities Solve Dangerous Dog Problems”
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In this country; 4-5 million dog bites a year, nearly 800,000 emergency department or clinic visits, a large number of hospital

admissions, and 10-20 deaths a year (a figure unchanged for decades). My intention was to at least center the participants. These figures represent a preventable epidemic, and I fear that we, as dog fanciers, often focus on the local problem of a particular breed, or impacting and pending legislation, without perhaps realizing that there is a large public health issue, which I fear gets lost in the emotion of the issue. We need to utilize a wider attack front, and work with the public, the media, the politicians, dog owners and breeders to increase our involvement in the attempt to reduce the magnitude of these numbers. Ultimately, the Task Force published “A Community Approach to Dog Bite Prevention,” a slightly soporific piece, but an attempt to delineate areas where different components of a community could be involved or targeted, and suggesting a far-reaching master plan.



Photo © Corbis

Having said that, let me expound on the conference itself, so as to give a sense of the depth and quality of the presentations. Dr. Amy Marder, a veterinarian associated with the Animal Rescue League of Boston, spoke on temperament testing on impounded animals: how to differentiate those safe for rehabilitation and rehoming, from those destined for euthanasia. Another vet, Dr. Gary Clemons, spoke on the role of his practice in integrating puppies into families, working with that difficult dog, etc. He hosts [Pet Talk](#) on WCKY-Radio 550 AM, and, I believe, accessible on the Internet. A great contrast in community approaches was offered by Nancy Hill, Animal Control Director, Spokane County, and Pam Sears, chief assistant prosecuting attorney in Hamilton County, Ohio. The former spoke of a very extensive proactive response to “dangerous dogs,” and an extensive program of working with both responsible and irresponsible dog owners. Ms. Sears, clearly a dog-lover, is in an environment where the punitive forces have an upper hand. For example, it is now illegal to own a “pit-bull” in Cincinnati, and if a wandering “pit bull” dog, even if uninvolved in any aggression, is impounded, the dog will be euthanized if its owner is a city resident. However, just a few weeks ago, a court decision threw this extreme solution into limbo. Nancy Campbell, NAIA Director of canine issues, spoke to the role of responsible breeding and ownership. Jane R. Berkey, President of Animal Farm Foundation, gave a wonderful talk. She runs a rescue foundation for pit bulls and has a difficult mission—restoring the image of this breed which has such a noble history, but suffers such public ignominy recently. Her photo presentation was very moving.

Several other speakers represented AKC positions and commitments: Carmen Battaglia (AKC Companion Animal recovery, CAR), Stephanie Lane, AKC’s director of legislation. Perhaps most moving, entertaining, galvanizing was the story told by Michael Hingson, a blind man, who along with his seeing eye dog Roselle, led each other to safety from the 87th floor of the World Trade Tower on 9/11. A lovely man, a gorgeous Lab, quite a team.

The audience was wide-ranging, from shelter workers, to breed devotees, to city planners, which are in the front-line in this public debate. I suspect all went home to their respective work with a mission. I do know that Patti Strand was very pleased with the first conference on this topic, and she has eyes on a repeat in Florida in autumn, 2005. Hmmm....



Holiday Party Photos!

Here's how we restrain our dogs, right Tonya?



This little Scottie dog will go on our mantle, Sue!



Rock, paper, scissors, Wayne!



And this is my new hand signal for Ken to bring me coffee!



Sure I'll balance the checkbook...on my head!



Now I can add salt and pepper to my dog's food!



I'm going to get in touch with my "feminine side"!



Then I put the beets in a blender...added vodka...

