

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **PIJAC reinstates six annual awards, honors at annual meeting**

ORLANDO, FLORIDA—The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) honored six of its members as standouts in the North American responsible pet trade at its annual meeting, held to coincide with the American Pet Product Association's Global Pet Expo. The awards recognize efforts in advocacy, communications, and leadership, and are being given out for the first time in several years.

“PIJAC’s awards for advocacy show what leaders in our industry do to create a bright future for pet care professionals and pet lovers alike,” said PIJAC Board of Directors Chair Laura “Peach” Reid. “The Board of Directors and staff felt it was important that we bring back these awards for the first time since 2015 because PIJAC and the entire industry are reliant on these amazing members.”

Louis McCann, who in February announced his retirement as President of PIJAC Canada, was given the Lifetime Achievement Award for his 40 years advocating on behalf of companion animals and pet owners. This year’s award has been renamed in memory of former PIJAC Director of Industry and Media Relations Nancy Knutson. Knutson passed away in February 2016 after more than 25 years of service with PIJAC.

PIJAC’s Ambassador of the Year award went to Zoo Med Laboratories, Inc. Senior Director of Sales David Dieter. Dieter’s advocacy on behalf of PIJAC played a significant role in Zoo Med becoming a PIJAC member in 2017. He was also a critical part of some of PIJAC’s social media and public awareness campaigns in 2017, and serves on PIJAC’s Herptile Committee.

The PIJAC Chair’s Award of Excellence went to Aquatics Committee Co-Chair Chris Buerner. Buerner is President of Quality Marine, and was a key organizer and panelist at PIJAC’s 2017 Aquatic Experience town hall. Chris has been a dedicated and persuasive voice in the fight to prevent the closure of the marine trade in Hawaii, and he regularly pushes his colleagues and competitors to seek ways to improve the trade as a whole.

The Pet Industry Leader of the Year was BEAK, the Bird Enjoyment & Advantage Coalition. Founded in 2016 to provide a more secure future for avian hobbyists and professionals through greater bird ownership in America, BEAK made great strides in 2017. One highlight was the launch of the MyRightBird website and quiz, which helps match people to the right bird for them. The site also offers a bird locator and an avian vet locator.

Chris Foschini, owner of the Pet N’ Pals pet store in Virginia, won PIJAC’s Advocate of the Year award. In both 2017 and 2018, Foschini led a pet store coalition to success with Virginia lawmakers. Foschini’s leadership improved relationships with lawmakers, was key in negotiating important amendments in several bills, and helped block several bills that would have harmed both stores and their customers. . Foschini also co-authored a *Washington Post* op-ed with PIJAC Vice President of Government Affairs Robert Likins about advocates’ work at the state capitol.

The final PIJAC award, for Excellence in Communications, went to Zoetis for its “Pet Effect” campaign. This comprehensive effort to raise awareness of the benefits of companion animal ownership and the human-animal bond included pitch-perfect commercials, a top-notch website, and a partnership with the

Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI). Zoetis' work also highlighted the critical work veterinarians do in helping people and animals connect.

“PIJAC is grateful to our amazing members for their work to **PROMOTE** responsible pet ownership and animal welfare, **FOSTER** environmental stewardship, & **ENSURE** the availability of pets,” said PIJAC President and CEO Mike Bober. “These awards are just a small token of our appreciation and a challenge to do even greater things in 2018.”

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*Since 1970, the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) has protected pets, pet owners and the pet industry – promoting responsible pet ownership and animal welfare, fostering environmental stewardship, and ensuring the availability of pets. PIJAC members include retailers, companion animal suppliers, manufacturers, wholesale distributors, manufacturers' representatives, pet hobbyists, and other trade organizations.*