

**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL:**  
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Media Contact:  
Gwyn Donohue  
202-452-1525, x1080  
[gwyn@pijac.org](mailto:gwyn@pijac.org)

## **PIJAC'S ANNUAL AWARDS HONOR OUTSTANDING PET CARE COMMUNITY LEADERS**

ORLANDO, Fla. – March 19, 2019 – The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) today recognized the exceptional accomplishments of an esteemed group of pet care community professionals with six awards during a ceremony held in conjunction with the Global Pet Expo pet industry trade show at the Orange County Convention Center.

“We at PIJAC celebrate the achievements of the outstanding individuals and organizations we recognized with 2019 PIJAC annual awards,” said PIJAC Board Chair Laura “Peach” Reid, president of Fish Mart, Inc. in West Haven, Conn. “Their tireless dedication has made a significant impact to the preservation and advancement of issues important to the responsible pet care community.”

Robert L. Vetere, president and CEO of the American Pet Products Association in Stamford, Conn., received **PIJAC's Nancy G. Knutson Lifetime Achievement Award** for his successful initiatives to unify the pet care community for the benefit of pets, pet owners and the professionals who serve both. Among his many accomplishments, Vetere was instrumental in the creation of the Human Animal Bond Research Institute and the Pet Leadership Council, and oversaw a period of tremendous industry growth and evolution in the way the community promotes its role as partners in pet care.

**PIJAC's Chair's Award of Excellence** was presented to Sandy Moore of Segrest Farms in Gibsonton, Fla., for her commitment to advancing the aquatics community and ensuring the health and well-being of fish and fisheries around the world. Moore has served as a PIJAC Director and chair of the Aquatics Committee since 2009, during which time she has recruited industry leaders, coordinated conservation efforts and facilitated relationships with domestic and international allies through her work with Ornamental Fish International and other associations.

Nestlé Purina was honored with the **Excellence in Communications Award** for its leadership in working to educate lawmakers, their staff and the general public about the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act. This important legislation, which became law in December 2018 as part of the Farm Bill, provides funds to assist women escaping domestic violence with their companion

animals. The materials Nestlé Purina created and shared, both independently and as part of a coalition of pet care organizations, were instrumental in securing the passage of the act.

The **Pet Care Community Leaders of the Year Award** went to the 2018 Herp Symposium Steering Committee in recognition of their work to plan and execute an event that brought together herp enthusiasts, industry representatives, and government officials for productive discussions on reptile and amphibian conservation, legal, regulatory, and health issues. The successful two-day event drew dozens of participants and a portion of the funds was donated to the International Herpetological Symposium's NextGen Herper and Junior Herper programs whose goal is to inspire young adults' interest in herpetology.

Boston business owners and siblings Rob, John and Lucia Mellace received PIJAC's **Ambassador of the Year Award**. A true American success story, the first-generation immigrant family grew Pet Express from a single store to five, while still making time to proactively establish and strengthen relationships with local, state and federal lawmakers whose actions could impact the Massachusetts pet care community. They have also been active advisors on state issues and successful recruiters of other small retailers for PIJAC.

PIJAC's **Pet Advocate of the Year Award** honoree is Alika Garcia of Hawaiian Reefer, LLC. A native Hawaiian diver and shipper of marine fish for the aquarium trade, Garcia has successfully engaged with state lawmakers on bills over the last several years that would have dramatically curtailed or ended the aquarium fishing trade. He recently led the organization of Oahu fishermen and a fundraising effort for Hawaii's Environmental Impact Statement and cultural assessment.

"The achievements of the 2019 PIJAC Award recipients are an inspiration to the entire pet care community," said PIJAC president and CEO Mike Bober. "From educating the public to cultivating strategic relationships with lawmakers, their work serves as an example to us all that every effort to promote responsible pet ownership and animal well-being matters, no matter how large or small."

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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.*