



Employee SPOTLIGHT

Meet Mark Hagen

Director

I have been blessed to lead such a lucky life, to have been able to learn and share countless heartwarming experiences with domestic animals. Please indulge me as I tell you about some stories with pets in my first twenty-five years that have guided me for the following forty years.

Growing up, our family has always been surrounded by pets. I got my first pet budgie, Polly, when I was almost ten years old, and we also had many fish tanks in our rooms well into our teenage years. On Saturdays, Dad would take his three sons “shopping” to the Sartelon warehouse – “write down all the item numbers” he would say so he could reconcile inventory. As his brothers were shareholders and owned a percentage of the items we took for our bird and fish, this lesson taught me to be fair and honest. My favourite freshwater fish was Red Mouthed Cichlids. After a few years, marine fish became a favourite and we would bring back the ones we caught in Nassau tide pools. The reefs were healthy in the 1970-80s and now it is sad to see the massive deterioration of that ecosystem. Hence, as a brand, Fluval is close to my heart. I love talking with the brand team and visiting the beautiful tanks they have set up in our head office. I have an empty tank and supplies ready to set up and keep saying one day I will take up the hobby again. Always love seeing that Rolf Jr. still has aquariums at his home.

After birds and fish, my experience with horses was significant in helping shape me. For six years, in our teens, we would spend our time at the “Hockey Ranch” in Ontario. For two weeks, we would have three hours of hockey training in the morning, lunch and then two hours learning to ride and care for a horse. I liked my horse more than hockey. Tom was always better at hockey. One year, we stayed up way past our curfew and got in trouble with the councillors. At midnight, they rounded all of us and we were marched to the barns and were told to clean the horse manure. We never had to clean the stalls before. I started to cry when the smell got to me. My councillor told me to take responsibility for my actions and I stopped crying and did the task at hand. I only realized later that being responsible for an animal under my care was the right thing to do. Hagen Group even had a slogan in the 1970s that said, “Responsible Pet Care”. I was proud that my horse had a clean stall the next day. And yes, sometimes I still have issues cleaning our cat litter box with having nine cats in our house over the past thirty years and am grateful that my wife Caroline is up for that task.

When I was seventeen, Dad had me work in the pet shops one summer to see what animal care was all about at the retail level. Great I thought, it would be fun interacting with all kinds of people. But that was not the case, I



did two-week rotations in mall stores around Montreal. It was hard work. I was cleaning puppy kennels, feeding mice to the snakes, cleaning bird cages and working 12-hour days on Thursdays and Fridays. I developed a huge respect for pet store owners and managers for all the work they did to maintain their stores. If I was a few minutes late, they would make me feel bad by reminding me that animals were waiting to be fed and cared for. I was proud of the fact that I did not quit. The experience reinforced the importance of treating everyone with kindness and gratitude, no matter their role.

The last summer I spent at home before moving out, I asked if I could work for our company veterinarian Dr. Bergeron. He had his clinic near our office. Dad agreed (thanks again Puppi). The experience deeply impacted me when I witnessed the heartbreaking reality of unwanted mother and puppies being dropped off (with

payment) to get euthanized. It is something I will never forget. I was to hold each one still as they were injected to put to sleep. I said NO WAY! But the vet explained that no shelter wanted them as they had too many themselves. In the late 1970s millions of births were wasted and too many animals had to be euthanized. Then, the early 1980s were the beginning of the spay and neuter campaigns. It grew my interest to become a vet and contribute to reducing the number of unnecessary births.

After a few years at Vanier College, it was time to become serious and I began my Bachelor of Science at the University of Guelph in Ontario. I focused on nutrition and zoology. One day, in 1983, I entered a parrot quarantine station in the back of our head office and asked, "what are we doing here with wild-caught parrots?". They were only eating sunflower seeds and so started my interest in parrot breeding. Years later, I convinced my parents that importing parrots from the wild did not make sense and they should really be bred in aviaries here. The only university program studying parrots was at University of California, so I did a semester there in between degrees. The courses in cage bird medicine, nutrition and avian science with famous professors Dr. Murry Fowler, Avian Vet and Richard Grau, Bird Nutritionist were the foundation for my Masters.



When I got back to Canada, becoming a veterinarian was out (found out you had to do Vet on cows and pigs and nope that was not happening). I was accepted in the program of Master of Agriculture specializing in Psittacine Aviculture at the University of Guelph. In 1985 I founded HARI and am very proud that HARI has gained a worldwide reputation for its ongoing studies into captive breeding, maintenance and nutrition of companion birds. I am a firm believer in sharing experiences and have had the pleasure of presenting at Avicultural conferences in Canada, USA, Australia and Ireland on the development of our formulated complete diets versus seed based which have excessive fat for a bird that uses a lot less energy not flying around looking for a nut tree.

Our HARI team was always dedicated to the improvement of parrot care in captivity, and I supported the development of the "Early Parrot Education" program that several HARI team members contributed to over many decades. Especially Josee Bermingham, who now manages HARI and the staff there. We also have been deeply involved in supporting the avian community and conservation projects around the globe by funding Loro Parque Foundation, Ara Manzanillo, the Belize Bird Rescue, World Wildlife Fund, Parrots International, One Earth Conservation and World Parrot Trust. For decades we donated all the funds from our HARI booth at the Canadian Parrot Symposium which averaged over \$3,000 each year of Tropicana food, large parrot cages and parrot toys I found at auctions from previous year. I still enjoy coordinating donations of Tropicana and parrot toys to parrot adoption centers and Parrot Clubs across Canada and USA. Conservation is very important to me, as seeing these birds in their natural habitat is very special considering that these birds face in habitat loss due to beef, soy and coffee agriculture. Josee just got back from her fourth trip to Costa Rica as part of our Conservation Networking Program.

I have been on the board of directors of the USA based Pet Care Trust for ten years in the 1990s and was proud to help develop a program "Animals and Fish in the Classroom"



with Dr. John Pitts. Teachers get \$250 worth of pet supplies towards the setup for their students. I am still on the Canadian Pet Industries Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) now called Pets Canada. We have regular meetings during trade shows and our group runs across Canada. During my tenure at Pets Canada, we developed best management practices for animal care within pet retail shops.

Animal care is important at all levels: breeders, retailers, adoption facilities, and of course consumers. I still support and help at all those levels with a passion. Although, semi-retired now, I find joy in supporting various projects and am an active board member. I love collecting old silver coins and gardening. Every year I plant four dozen tomato plants and sixty large Dahlia flower tubers that get stored in my wine cellar during winter.

Among the many cherished pets in my life, two stand out: Nova, one of our nine cats, and Terra, a beloved member of our pack of five dogs. Their stories hold a special place in my heart, and I would love to share them with you at the next trade show or lunch.

A heartfelt thank you to my brothers Rolf and Tom, to Uncle Dieter, and to all of you that support our brands. Together, we continue to create a brighter future for our beloved furry and feathered companions.