

# FSU law grad fights for animal rights

By Lindsay Marshall  
Democrat writer

Kevin Schneider, a recent graduate from Florida State's law school, is taking strides to support the animal community.

Schneider has worked to put FSU on the map for animal law, a field he is passionate about, paving the way for students to follow his lead and support a local nonprofit organization, Pets Ad Litem.

"I came to law school with the goal of doing animal law and environmental law and law in general," Schneider said. "I'm from Boston originally, so when I came down to Florida State, I got involved with the Animal Law Society."

During his second year of law school, as President of the Animal Law Society, Schneider helped to transform the organization into a Student Animal Legal Defense Fund (SALDF) chapter as a way to more easily access grants and funding.

"There are more than a hundred chapters, even in law schools out of the country," Schneider said.

"I spearheaded it because I was aware of the program before coming to law school and it put Florida State on the map with animal law."

SALDF stems from the national nonprofit ALDF, and was created 20 years ago in Portland, Ore., where it then spread to law schools everywhere.

"Because of the relationships they all have,



Schneider

they share ideas and can get funds from the parent organizations,"

Schneider said. "They fund travel, pay for speakers to visit schools, and provide a forum for education for law students."

SALDF has a close relationship with PAL, an organization dedicated to providing a legal voice for animals and supporting the animal community in more hands-on ways as well.

Schneider and PAL CEO Ralph DeMeo established a pro bono program for law students to provide free legal services with the organization.

"There's a 20 hour pro bono requirement for law students to graduate," DeMeo said. "It's mostly human charities, but Pets Ad Litem has been the only animal charity approved for the program. We've had 40 to 50 law students come through."

PAL is made up of volunteers who all have full-time jobs.

DeMeo is a lawyer with Hopping Green & Sams, and most other volunteers are lawyers as well.

However, there are also other professionals involved in the organization such as veterinarians, government officials, and the assistant director of the animal shelter.

"Kevin helped us do legislative analysis and research," DeMeo said. "There was an animal shelter bill that passed

this last session. Shelters have to keep records of the animals that come in and what comes of them."

In addition to the legislative aspect of PAL, the organization also aids the animal community in hands-on ways such as offering a class on responsible pet ownership, and providing food and supplies to the local animal shelter whenever needed.

"It's a way to really add some substance to law school," Schneider said. "Law can be dehumanizing, but this is a forum for something that people really care about, and it adds balance to their lives. It also adds a cultural matter and signals to the community that these issues are serious."

Schneider believes that animal law is a morally important field, as he is advocating for animals that have no legal voice.

His plans for the future involve a career in animal law, where DeMeo believes he will be a successful leader in the field, and continuing his work in helping future law students at Florida State.

With all he has accomplished, Schneider's hard work has been rewarded with the Outstanding Service Award by the Florida Bar Animal Law Committee.

"Statewide, he was definitely head and shoulders above all the other nominees," DeMeo said. "When you hear about animal abuse and then you hear about people like Kevin, it gives you hope."