



## Own a bird? Now What?

### TRAIN THEM THROUGH BEHAVIOR, OF COURSE.

By Concetta Ferragamo

There are behavior consultants throughout the entire nation who can be reached by phone, email, texting, face-time, workshops and, of course, educational conventions (such as the upcoming AFA convention in Portland, Oregon with a speaker track of 30 presenters). On average, most people who are interested in behavior training of their birds tend to attend as many workshops, seminars and presentations as possible. But, for some reason, people still want more; and that is a wonderful thing for your bird, your family, your neighbor and you as the owner. Good news for you! Did you know that there are actual brick and mortar, land location, training centers that you can visit and learn how train birds? You can attend a scheduled workshop and learn a variety of different behavioral techniques. This article features AFA commercial Member, Lara Joseph, and her outstanding Animal Behavior Center.

The Animal Behavior Center, LLC. is a 10,000 square foot animal training and educational facility located in Sylvania, Ohio which is a suburb of Toledo. Lara Joseph owns and operates the facility along with a group of highly dedicated volunteers. Having an animal behavior, training, and enrichment facility has been a mission of Joseph's for the past few years. Joseph reflected, "I would spend hours driving country roads and suburbs looking at large buildings, barns, and vacant lots and envisioning which buildings would best suit the purpose of this mission." A few years ago Joseph presented a behavior and training workshop for the Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitation Association (OWRA). During that presentation she continued her quest and inquired about what would be needed or desired as a functioning facility where she could temporarily take in injured wildlife. Joseph's aim was to take in the wildlife that could not be released, train them using positive reinforcement and then have them placed at different educational facilities across Ohio or beyond. Joseph had a mission in mind ranging from pets to wildlife.

In the fall of 2013, Joseph and her husband purchased a 10,000 square foot greenhouse on an acre of property in Sylvania, Ohio. The greenhouse had been out of business for over five years at that time. Joseph shared, "I remember the first time I

went into the greenhouse about eight years ago when it was still in business; and I remember tilting my head back and saying, 'Wow, this would be a great place to fly birds!' At that time, I never had any inclination to purchase a facility to train animals. I walk in this former greenhouse every morning thinking, 'Wow, am I really here, and is this really happening?'"

The renovation project commenced and the transformation was underway. On a daily basis, over a six month time frame, Joseph's visions were becoming a reality. Joseph described how a great deal of research, hard work and finely tuned details went into understanding how the greenhouse operated in order to convert it to an animal training facility. Joseph's objective was to have areas assigned for presentation purposes, which would be given by her, as well as national and international speakers, about animal care and conservation for both the animals and the people who care for them.

As the project continued, the facility was divided into two separate sections, in order to have a fabulously heated concrete floor. A full 1,000 square foot section was separated from the rest of the center to receive the poured concrete onto the heated floor and to build out a wall to separate it from the rest of the facility. The heated area is where the animals are housed when not being trained or not in programs or educational events, Joseph explained. With Joseph's vision and the help of Corner's Limited out of Kalamazoo, Michigan the heated room transformed into a state-of-the-art 9' tall x 8' wide x 8' deep enclosures, soon to be the home of seven parrots and one toucanette. Joseph said, "Most birds' health and function evolved through flight. The size of these cages are also an educational tool to show people who attend my workshops and animal training services, the importance of flight and training even when caged." Joseph said that there is another section that was developed. Joseph went on to share a story about an outer section of that room where a large outdoor enclosure from her former residence was brought over to the new facility. Joseph talked about how that particular cage was from when she "trained Moon and Willoughby, Nature's Nursery's program Barred Owl and Turkey Vulture." Joseph went

on to explain that the future “temporary” residents of that enclosure is where the state pre-approved animal will be housed.

Moving on from that newly-erected wall and heated room, we venture over to the rest of the 9,000 square foot building that has two glorious ceilings that open to the sky. Fret not. Joseph explained that there is special netting strategically placed which will prevent any accidental escape of animals from the inside as well as prevent the entrance of uninvited guests from the outside. The facility is lined with large spacious windows that cover the length of the walls front to back on both sides of the facility, which gives off the ambiance of being part of the breathtaking views of the surrounding trees. Joseph had a sparkle about her when she went on to describe, “With the flip of a switch, the windows open and fine wire mesh lines the windows between the inside and outside of the enclosure.” Looking on you will see that there is a 5ft. pit in the center of the facility with two staircases. Adding to the details, Joseph had an irrigation system installed in the pit. The open ceiling allows the light to pour over the plants of the former greenhouse to help them to continue to grow. With a chuckle, Joseph added that they actually have to mow grass in December. An enthusiastic Joseph went on to say, “It’s a pretty cool sight to see. It is an indoor enclosure that doesn’t really seem indoors with the grass and the open windows and ceiling. What’s even more cool is to see animals come in here, especially dogs! They look around and you can see them trying to soak in exactly what this place is. They don’t last two minutes before you see them take off in a dead run, full speed ahead, seeing the freedom they have with an enclosed park!” The indoor/outdoor theme continues with banana trees, magnolia trees, fig trees, hanging vegetable gardens, vines, and water plants that are all throughout the entire facility, including a 650 gallon pond with fish. Pond? Fish? Animal Behavior Center for training? Yes, if you haven’t guessed it by now, I will let you know—the fish get trained too! Joseph did explain that the entire center is not heated, so most of the plants and the fish go dormant during the winter; but it is still a sight to behold.



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The presentation area consists of a 1,000 square foot concrete section located at the back corner of a grassed-in area, Joseph described. This area is designated as a presentation and workshop place for attendees to learn how to use applications in training and behavior modification with a diverse group of animals. The area is set up with tables, chairs and a pull-down screen to display power-point presentations. The presentation section is also an area that can be utilized when training animals isolated from other animals.

Joseph discussed the mission behind the facility and how the focus and intent is to help people learn how to increase their working or companion relationships with the animals they care for through means of positive reinforcement and positive interaction of applications in behavior analysis. Joseph went on to talk about how applications and approaches in behavior analysis can be used on any animal. She explained that her mission is an approach to control, modify behavior, and teach new behaviors without the use of force. Joseph advocates the use of positive reinforcement and the importance of reinforcing behaviors you want to see maintained or increased in the animal. Joseph defined, "Applied Behavior Analysis is the process of using environmental events to control behavior." Joseph gave examples: "You're not going to get in a tank and spank a whale because it gave you the wrong behavior, right? You're also not going to smack a tiger and tell him 'bad boy' for peeing in the corner." Joseph further explained that her intentions are to help educate the public by showing examples of how people do not need to force animals to do certain things that we don't want them to do. Joseph went on to explain, "Often times this just teaches the animal how to do the undesired behavior quicker or be sneakier about it. It rarely modifies the behavior, and if it does, it doesn't come without its consequences." The approach that Joseph uses to modify behavior and teach new behaviors is not necessarily about the species or breed of animal, "it is more about observing environmental events of the animal, utilizing reinforcers and punishers of behavior, while empowering the animals and teaching them that consequences of their choices do serve a purpose in their environment."

Joseph talked about the vast variety of animals being trained at the facility and how the diversity continues to rapidly grow: "parrots, fish, dogs, rabbits, a toucan, more dogs, rabbits, pigs, rats, a goat, a turkey vulture, and most importantly, humans" Joseph said. Joseph shared a concern, "I need to get through to the humans in order to have a consequence to the animals." Joseph went on to say, "How can I not train all animals if I know this works on everything? These applications in behavior are used in our daily lives whether we realize it or not. When we have the tools and understand how to use them, then we have control over the animals' environment and can reward animals for desired behaviors we want to see maintained or increased. This approach helps take the stress out of animals under our care and definitely has an impact on people observing us working with the animals and also getting the behaviors we are requesting, with no use of force and little stress, if any."

As things got rolling, The Animal Behavior Center, LLC. was finally opened to the public in February of 2013. Joseph succeeded in creating her vision of an educational facility, which is being utilized by all types of people working with animals from all areas of the world. Joseph understands that not everyone can attend an in-house workshop at a land location, so she offers on-line sessions and webinars to people too. Joseph offers help to all through live behavior and training consultations on-line, in her facility, or as a guest speaker at workshops abroad. Joseph has a selection of services to choose from that people can partake in at her facility with one-on-one training or as a group session, both with hands-on training. Joseph does still travel for speaking events, but happily admits that she enjoys being able to spend more time at home with her husband and their own animals which includes birds, many fish and dogs too.

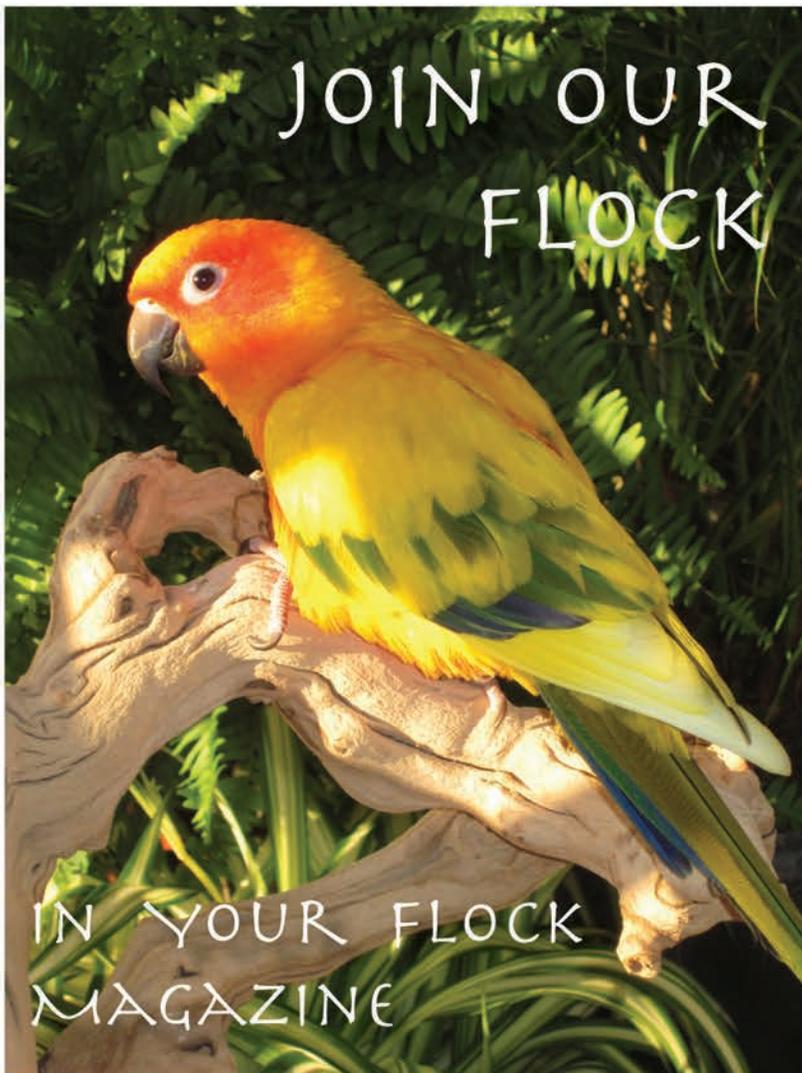
The creation of her dream come true, Animal Behavior Center has been an exhilarating experience the start, with people attending from all over the nation as well as internationally. Joseph, tirelessly says, "The sky is the limit. Why not?" Joseph has made a point to express her gratitude as well, saying "I am very thankful to everyone who has helped me get here, especially Nature's Nursery who has put their trust in me and given me the opportunity to work so close with so many different local wildlife."

You can see training videos and photos of The Animal Behavior Center on their Facebook page.

*Lara is the owner of The Animal Behavior Center, LLC in Ohio. She presents workshops, travels, lectures, and consults, focusing on positive reinforcement interactions and modifying behavior through applications in behavior analysis. She is also the Director of Avian Training for a wildlife rehabilitation center, where she focuses on taking stress out of animal environments. Lara is a professional member of The Animal Behavior Management Alliance the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators. She is also a member of and writes for The Pet Professional Guild and the founder of The Parrot Society of NW Ohio. For more information visit her website at [TheAnimalBehaviorCenter.com](http://TheAnimalBehaviorCenter.com) or contact her at [TheAnimalBC@gmail.com](mailto:TheAnimalBC@gmail.com) or by phone at 419-360-1234.*



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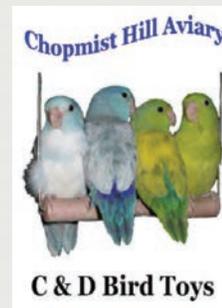
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