



# Carolinas **UNITE**

ANIMAL WELFARE PROFESSIONALS CONFERENCE



# MARCH 10-12, 2026



# WELCOME to CU2026!

On behalf of the North Carolina Animal Federation (NCAF) and the South Carolina Animal Care & Control Association (SCACCA), welcome to CarolinasUNITE.

We are excited to bring together animal welfare and animal care & control professionals from across the Carolinas for a conference focused on collaboration, connection, and practical solutions. Over the next few days, we encourage you to engage fully—learn from one another, share experiences, and build relationships that strengthen our work and the communities we serve. Thank you for being part of CarolinasUNITE and for the important work you do every day.

Shelly Simmons, SCACCA  
Elizabeth Overcash, NCAF

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## What's on the Menu?

### TUESDAY LUNCH:

Baked Potato Salad | Soup of the Day  
Heirloom tomato and English cucumber salad  
Roasted turkey, black forest ham, shaved prime rib of beef, and  
Sopressata salami  
Freshly baked breads  
Assorted cheeses, bib lettuce, heirloom tomato, red onion,  
gherkins  
Condiments  
Assorted chips, freshly baked cookies and brownies  
Coffee, Tea, and Assorted Soft Drinks

### WEDNESDAY BREAKFAST:

Seasonal fruit and berries  
Fresh baked pastries, muffins, croissants and assorted bagels  
Butter, cream cheese, and fresh fruit preserves  
Assorted individual yogurts with granola toppings  
Assorted breakfast sandwiches to include bacon, eggs, cheese  
Coffee, tea, assorted juices

### WEDNESDAY LUNCH:

Orzo & Tomato Pesto salad | Caprese salad  
Cavatappi pasta pomodoro  
Tuscan-style vegetables  
Chicken breast with portabella mushrooms and marsala wine  
Focaccia bread  
Mini cannoli and chocolate eclairs  
Coffee, Tea, and Assorted Soft Drinks

### WEDNESDAY NETWORKING SOCIAL:

Wings with Ranch and Blue Cheese Dressing  
Angus Sliders on Hawaiian Buns  
Mozzarella Sticks  
Onion Rings  
Pepperoni & Cheese Pizza  
Fresh Mixed Salad

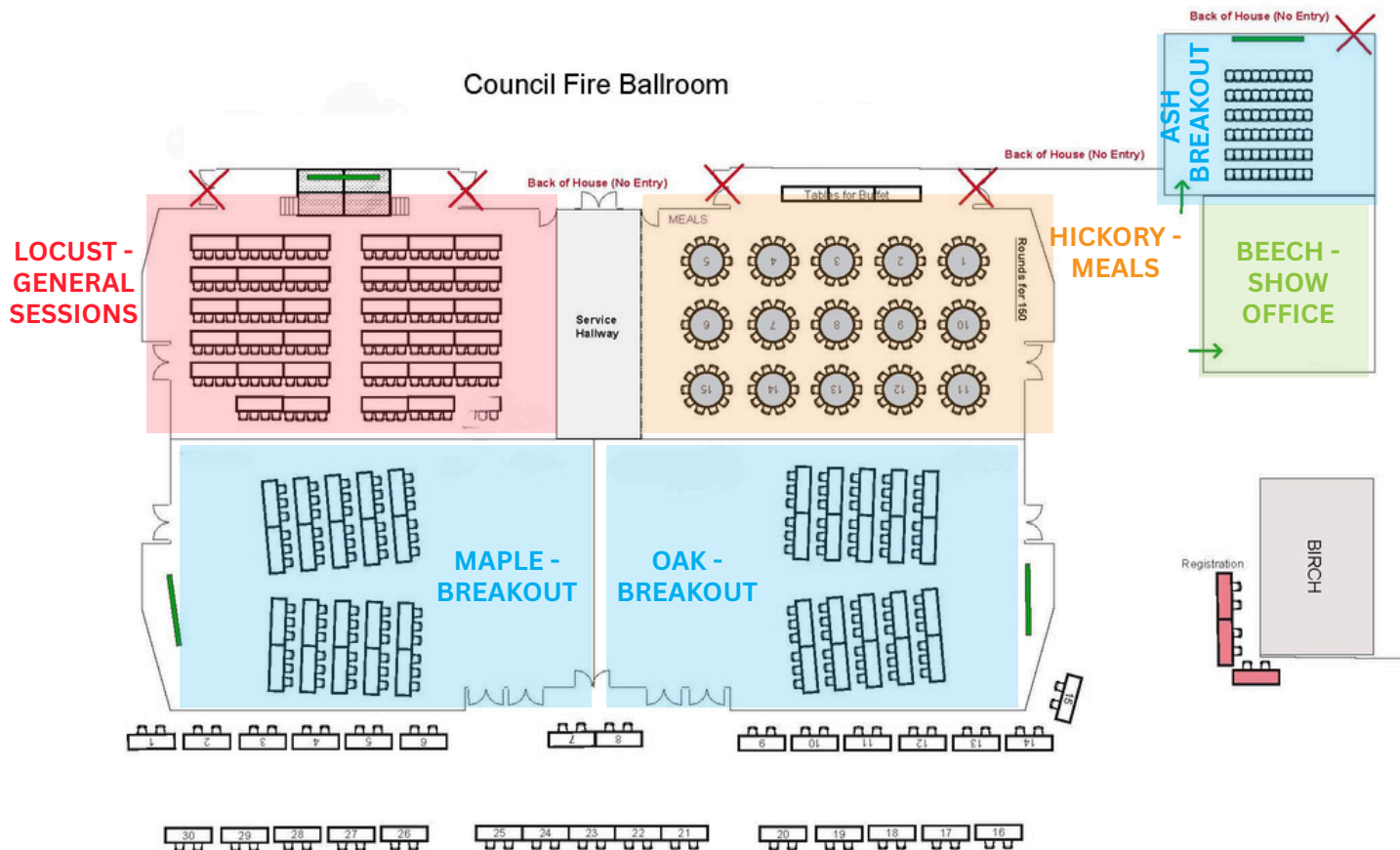
*Three drink tickets included - good for beer and wine only  
Cocktails available for purchase*

### THURSDAY BREAKFAST:

Seasonal fruit and berries  
Fresh baked pastries, muffins, croissants, and assorted bagels  
Butter, cream cheese and fresh fruit preserves  
Breakfast burrito - sausage, scrambled eggs, peppers, onions and  
cheese  
Breakfast potatoes  
Coffee, tea, assorted juices

**\*All meals will have a vegetarian option. If you do not see one, please ask the banquet staff.**

# Conference Map



## EXHIBITOR BOOTH LOCATIONS

<u>Booth Number</u>	<u>Company Name</u>	<u>Booth Number</u>	<u>Company Name</u>
27	24 Pet by Pet Place	16	Merck
3	Adopt A Shelter Plus	5	NACA
15	AKC Reunite	32	NCAF
2	Animal Keepers	13	NCARCA
9	ASPCA	19	PETA
6	Best Friends	21	PetCo Love
12	Charleston Animal Society	11	PetData
29	Diversified Training	4	PetHub
26	DocuPet	17	PetLink
14	Doobert	31	SCACCA
24	Elanco	28	Shelter Architecture Unleashed
18	GBC Fundraising	23	ShelterLuv
8	Hills Pet Nutrition	7	Step & Repeat
1	Humane World for Animals	22	Stewart, Cooper, Newell
25	Humane World for Animals - Wildlife	10	Trupanion
30	Jackson Creek Manufacturing	20	Virbac

# Tuesday, March 10

Time	Location	Speaker(s)	Session Title and Description
8:00am	Pre-Function		Registration Open
9:30am	Exhibit Hall		Exhibit Hall Open
10:00am-10:15am	Locust	Shelly Simmons & Emily Brewer	<b>Opening Remarks: Hitting the Jackpot for Pets &amp; People</b> Kick off CarolinasUNITE 2026 with a welcome focused on collaboration, community, and practical ideas to help animal welfare professionals go all in for animals and the people who serve them.
10:15am-11:30am	Locust	Tori Fugate	<b>Why Your Data Matters: Joining the National Conversation with Shelter Animals Count</b> Learn how submitting shelter data shapes national policy, funding decisions, and public narratives—and how your organization can benefit from dashboards, tools, and true representation.
11:30am-11:45am	Exhibit Hall		Break
11:45am-12:45pm	Maple	Grace Kahler	<b>Bridging the Gap: Shelters and Wildlife Coexistence</b> Explore humane, practical approaches to managing wildlife conflicts through community partnerships, reducing field workload while improving outcomes for people and wildlife.
11:45am-12:45pm	Oak	Cathy Wilson	<b>Thinking Outside the Kennel: Maximizing Lifesaving with Petco Adoptions</b> Discover how partnerships with Petco and Petco Love can expand adoption opportunities, increase visibility, and save more lives—both in shelters and beyond.
11:45am-12:45pm	Ash	Spencer Conover	<b>So You Want to Be the Boss?</b> A candid look at modern leadership challenges, workplace culture, and practical strategies for aspiring leaders and seasoned executives alike.
12:45pm-2:00pm	Hickory		Lunch - Sponsored by Cashiers Highlands Humane Society
2:00pm-3:00pm	Maple	Cameron Moore & Jen Walter	<b>Every Day Counts: Safely Shortening Shelter Stays</b> Learn data-driven strategies to reduce length of stay while maintaining safety, improving outcomes, and lowering stress for animals and staff.
2:00pm-3:00pm	Oak	Carol Whaley & Steph Rose	<b>Building Inclusive Adoption Practices: Adopters Welcome</b> Explore conversation-based adoption practices that remove barriers, support staff and volunteers, and build lasting relationships with adopters.
2:00pm-3:00pm	Ash	Tori Fugate	<b>Data-Driven Animal Control: Enhancing Community Impact</b> Learn how tracking the right metrics can improve operations, demonstrate impact, and strengthen support for animal control programs.
3:00pm-3:30pm	Exhibit Hall		Break
3:30pm-4:45pm	Locust	Misty Valenta & Brent Toellner	<b>Community Is the Key to Managed Intake</b> See how community-centered managed intake programs can reduce shelter strain while better serving pets and the people who care for them.
4:45pm			Dinner on Your Own

# Wednesday, March 11

Time	Location	Speaker(s)	Session Title and Description
8:00am	Pre-Function		Registration and Exhibit Hall Open
8:00am-9:00am	Hickory		Breakfast - Sponsored by ASPCA
9:00am-10:15am	Locust	Jackie Rose & Gina Knepp	<b>The Culture of Return to Home: Why It Matters</b> Discover proactive strategies to reunite lost pets with families before shelter entry, easing capacity challenges and supporting pet retention.
10:15am-10:30am	Exhibit Hall		Break
10:30am-11:30am	Maple	Leah Craig Chumbley	<b>Caring for Animal Welfare Staff in Difficult Work</b> Learn practical ways to build a culture of care that supports staff resilience, engagement, and long-term impact.
10:30am-11:30am	Oak	Jo Jarred, DVM	<b>Compassionate Compliance: Bella's Story</b> Walk through a real-life case study that balances regulations with compassion using interactive decision-making and empathy-based tools.
10:30am-11:30am	Ash	Shelly Simmons & Staci Kehir, DVM	<b>The Art of Herding Cats, Dogs, and People</b> Learn how to plan and execute large-scale pet support events—like clinics and TNR days—using scalable systems that work for organizations of any size.
11:30am-1:00pm	Hickory		Lunch - Sponsored by PETA
1:00pm-2:00pm	Maple	Jillian Sergio	<b>Flip the Script: Frontline Staff Shape Your Story</b> Explore how frontline interactions influence public perception and learn tools for communication rooted in empathy, dignity, and trust.
1:00pm-2:00pm	Oak	Tori Fugate	<b>Saying the Hard Things: Transparent Communication About Euthanasia</b> Gain practical strategies for communicating honestly and compassionately about euthanasia—internally and publicly—while building trust and unity.
1:00pm-2:00pm	Ash	John Graves	<b>More Than TNVR: Community Cat Program Cornerstones</b> Review the essential components of successful community cat programs, from engagement and mitigation to proactive problem-solving.
2:00pm-2:15pm	Exhibit Hall		Break
2:15pm-3:15pm	Maple	Misty Valenta	<b>All Bets on Connection!</b> Discover how authentic community relationships—not internal metrics alone—predict long-term success, resilience, and lifesaving impact.
2:15pm-3:15pm	Oak	Jackie Peery	<b>Tech That Saves Tails: Bootcamp Edition</b> Hands-on exploration of accessible tools like ChatGPT, Canva, and Notion to help shelters save time, reduce stress, and work smarter.
2:15pm-3:15pm	Ash	Elkie Wills	<b>The HASS and Field Services Connection</b> Learn how compassionate enforcement and community engagement can redefine field services and improve outcomes from intake to placement.
3:15pm-3:30pm	Exhibit Hall		Break
3:30pm-4:45pm	Locust	Spencer Conover	<b>Innovative Leadership to Build a Better Team</b> Understand personality styles, motivation, and team dynamics to strengthen communication, collaboration, and organizational effectiveness.
5:30pm - 7:30pm	UltraStar		Networking Social - Sponsored by Humane World for Animals

# Thursday, March 12

Time	Location	Speaker(s)	Session Title and Description
8:00am-9:00am	Hickory		Breakfast - Sponsored by ASPCA
8:00am-12:00pm	Exhibit Hall		Exhibit Hall Open
9:00am-10:15am	Locust	Jennifer Bonovich, DVM	<b>Veterinary Forensics 101</b> An introduction to veterinary forensics and its growing role in cruelty, neglect, and enforcement cases, featuring real-world examples.
10:15am-10:30am	Maple	NCAF	<b>State Agency Updates: South Carolina</b> Hear the latest on legislation, training, and initiatives from SCACCA, plus an open forum to share needs and challenges.
10:15am-10:30am	Oak	SCACCA	<b>State Agency Updates: North Carolina</b> Hear the latest on legislation, training, and initiatives from NCAF, plus an open forum to share needs and challenges.
10:30am-11:45am	Maple	Shelly Simmons & Emily Brewer	<b>Closing &amp; Prizes: All In' Until the End!</b> Wrap up the conference celebrating wins, connections, and lessons learned—plus a chance to walk away a winner.
11:45am			Adjourn

*CarolinasUnite is an approved provider for CAWA continuing education credits. All sessions are eligible.*

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Thank you to the 2026 Planning Committee for their hard work and dedication:

Jana Aviles  
Laura Clark  
Marli Clary  
Josh Fisher  
Joanna Jarred  
Brittany Jones  
Lisa Lee  
Kate Marshall  
Elizabeth Overcash  
Shelly Simmons  
Gail Thomssen

*If you are interested in joining the planning committee for 2027, please email [info@carolinasunite.org](mailto:info@carolinasunite.org) or stop by the registration desk and let one of the volunteers know.*

# Notes



**Humane World  
for Animals™**

