

Maremma Sheepdog Club of America



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Board of Directors Candidate Biography

Please return this application to the above address.

Date: October 8, 2021

Position(s) running for: President

Name: Cindy M. Benson
First MI Last

Residence

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Please share a brief biography: I have been raising livestock my whole live. The study of animal husbandry and behavioral science has taken me far. I live on our 360-acre ranch in Oregon with over one hundred animals, including the sixteen adult Maremmas that keep my livestock safe. I have shipped livestock we produced here all over the United States and to Europe, have an extensive competitive show history with them, and have been a cutting-edge breeder for almost thirty years. Forever a student, I have completed extensive coursework related to training and how animals learn. This is a passion of mine. I am a published author and educator. I was recently honored by the Karen Pryor Academy for my training work with livestock guardian dogs. I learn from my animals every day, and I share what they have taught me through my web site and extensive blogs library.

Experience you have that would be helpful in this Board position?

In 2014, after suffering our third livestock loss to mountain lions, the first Maremmas arrived. Oh my! I had never asked a dog of mine to sleep outdoors before the LGDs came and I certainly never aspired to breed dogs. My relationship with my Maremmas changed my life in profound ways. I believe in predator preservation. I believe that I am part of the ecosystem and that my task is to learn how to live in harmony with it. As I added more and more Maremmas to our ranch I became increasingly captivated by them, and I made the decision to devote much of my life to them through participation as a breeder, educator, and member of the MSCA. In 2017, it was my privilege to become the Secretary of the MSCA.

Working with Debi Reid, as President, was my honor. I learned from the master. Debi taught me of the history of the club and guided me through the ethical balance of being the Secretary. I believe that the club Bylaws are *rules*, a framework for all members to abide by. They are not suggestions, and are not to be interpreted broadly. There were many times that, as the club Secretary, I found myself in positions with members when following the rules created friction. As a servant to this club it was my job to follow the rules, and so I did. For three years I worked 10-15 hours a week in service to the MSCA as a volunteer. I learned so much about the needs of the membership and how to support Maremmas as a breed. Almost weekly, members contacted me in an effort to surrender their dogs to our rescue. I believe that through education the club can assist our members in being successful with their dogs.

Why do you want to hold this position on the Maremma Sheepdog Club of America Board of Directors?

Because I was in service to this club for three years, I understand the promise of a fully functioning Board. The angst of the last ten months has shown all of us how fragile a club can be. I absolutely, completely believe that it is possible to come through this experience the stronger for it. Through social media it is possible for members to connect with each other while preserving their privacy. This is such an improvement over sharing a membership list, complete with addresses and phone numbers! As members, we have been isolated from each other, but that has changed. The Board of Directors is the voice of the membership. I look forward to working with the membership, as partners, and creating a dynamic future for the club.

Any further information you would like the Membership to know about you?

There are two people who fully understand the inner workings of the paperwork behind this club: memberships, farm names, litter registrations, and dog registrations. Those two people are Debi Reid and myself. That cannot continue! I recently submitted to the current Board a seventeen-page document that outlined the functions of the club's paperwork. I hope that document went forward in a positive fashion. The introduction of the Associated Registry as the business entity that will process our so important club documents is exciting, but they can only assist the club so far as the information they have been given. Oversight needs to happen in order to preserve the accuracy of the club's records, including pedigrees. I look forward to serving this club again, this time also working with the Associated Registry.

What is your vision for the future of the MSCA?

I am the right person to bring this club together to a point of trust with one another. As the club President, I commit to working closely with the membership so that the Board reflects the needs of the membership. The disconnect of the last ten months is beyond regrettable, and it was unnecessary. Better days are ahead. Through ethics, honesty, transparency, and tireless dedication, I am the right member to serve as the President of this club.

My vision for the club is that we pull together. We have, as members, been islands. We have not had a means to connect with each other. Our emails have gone un-answered, our paperwork un-processed. Some of this has been a function of a justifiable transition, but certainly not all of it. I look forward to working with the membership, not only with the basic business of handling the minimum of paperwork needed, but of dreams for the club. What about a new web site, dynamic with participation from the members? What about a newsletter? Debi's newsletters were wonderful and amazing. There were so

many committees we discussed as Board members, such as education, promotion of the breed, a welcome to new members, and the list goes on and on. The future is bright!

What are your top 3 priorities for the MSCA in the next three years?

Here are my top priorities: I want to work with the Associated registry to streamline the processing and accuracy of our club documents. I want to connect members so that we can work together so that all of our voices are reflected in the decisions of the Board. And I would like to take a good look at our current Bylaws because I think they need to be revised, to be brought to the current times. As they stand, they did not afford the general membership the ability to be heard. That is not OK with me.