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## Life

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### The underdog museum

## Santa Barbara resident behind new breed of museum that furthers the human-animal bond

BRETT LEIGH DICKS, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT  
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It's not just dogs that have their day in Los Angeles. For the past five years, the National Museum of Animals & Society has made sure cats, mice and even chickens have had their moment in the spotlight.

The museum is the brainchild of Santa Barbara resident Carolyn Merino Mullin, founder and executive director. Since its inception in 2010, the museum has been dedicated to enriching the lives of animals and people by exploring the shared experience between the two.

Having opened a gallery space in Hollywood two years ago, the museum has recently put its exhibition on hiatus while it holds a fundraising campaign to move into a larger, more permanent space near Wilshire Boulevard's Miracle Mile. After much discussion, the museum's administration and board has decided on a part of Los Angeles that has become known as Museum Row.

"Everyone had their own ideas and I even suggested Santa Barbara," said Ms. Mullin, 32, who moved here around the same time the National Museum of Animals & Society opened the Hollywood gallery. "If we really want to change hearts and minds and reach the most number of people possible, we have to be in L.A. because it's one of the biggest cities in the world. So we're currently looking at locations in the Museum Row area, near LACMA, the Craft and Folk Art Museum and the Petersen (Automotive) Museum, in preparation for opening the new museum this fall."

After earning a bachelor's degree in religious studies with a focus on religion and nature from the University of Florida, Ms. Mullin graduated from Regis University in Denver with a master's degree in nonprofit management in 2008. She has since combined her extensive experience in animal protection, which includes orchestrating several initiatives to ban gestation crates, veal crates and battery cages, with museum administration work for institutions such as the Miami Museum of Science, the Chico Museum and Casa Dolores in Santa Barbara.

The idea for the National Museum of Animals & Society came to Ms. Mullin when

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The National Museum of Animals & Society is designed to enrich the human-animal bond.

COURTESY PHOTOS



The National Museum of Animals & Society opened its first gallery space in Hollywood with an exhibition titled "My Dog is My Home: The Experience of Human-Animal Homelessness."



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she first entered the museum world and realized that while most social issues were represented by a museum, animal protection wasn't.

With an extensive history both in animal protection and museum administration, Santa Barbara resident Carolyn Merino Mullin established the National Museum of Animals & Society.

"The emphasis of the museum is animal protection and exploring our relationship with animals," Ms. Mullin told the News-Press by telephone from L.A. "We opened the museum because there wasn't really anything like this. Every other social movement had a museum dedicated to its cause — civil rights, women's suffrage, the labor movement — but animal protection wasn't represented at all."

After three years of building up a strong online presence, the museum launched its Hollywood gallery space on Melrose Avenue in 2013 with an exhibition titled "My Dog is My Home: The Experience of Human-Animal Homelessness," which looked at the role animal companions play in the lives of the homeless. Other exhibitions included "DOG CAT MOUSE," a show comprised of work by Santa Barbara artists Erika Carter, Virginia McCracken and Heather Mattoon, who centered their creativity around canines, felines and the more diminutive, but no less important, rodent.

One of the most popular and memorable exhibitions was "Uncooped: Deconstructing the Domesticated Chicken," which explored the cultural attitudes associated with one of the most common yet often overlooked of all domesticated animals, the chicken.

"Not only did we want to give chickens their day, but we wanted to look at how they've impacted our culture," Ms. Mullin told the News-Press. "We looked at gender studies and terminology in everyday language. Why do we call women 'chicks' and why do they 'henpeck' or 'brood'? And why are men 'cocky'? We also had a hen adoption event in conjunction with that exhibition where 93 hens were adopted."

The gallery hosted about six exhibitions prior to closing last November to prepare for its relocation. On the agenda for the new space are important global issues such as pet overpopulation and wildlife conservation that will be tackled in a permanent exhibition on animal protection, while the new building will debut the much anticipated "Crazy Cat Ladies" exhibit.

"This museum is really the underdog museum," Ms. Mullin said with a laugh. "We were the last social justice issue to come to the table when it comes to having its own museum. We see ourselves as a new breed of museum. We're a museum in a typical sense where you come and read and learn and look at artifacts, but we also want to enrich the human-animal bond and for us that means helping real animals."

"We want you to bring the whole family in and maybe walk out with a new member — like a chicken."

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**FYI**

To find out more about the National Museum of Animals & Society or to donate, go to [www.museumofanimals.org](http://www.museumofanimals.org).

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