

A Humane sentence

Former worker with embattled Glendale animal shelter pleads no contest

NEWS

By Anne Louise Bannon

Last week's sentencing of former Glendale Humane Society employee Gerald Gracian may not completely close the door on the facility's difficulties, but it does signal progress, said observers.

"This is just one step in that road to recovery," said Steve McNall, executive director of the Pasadena Humane Society.

McNall has been working with the Glendale Humane Society shelter since an audit last summer turned up a number of problems in addition to Gracian's theft of several thousand dollars. Investigators also found that Gracian, 35, had been keeping over 200 animals in his North Hollywood home. Gracian eventually pleaded no contest to the charges.

There is some disappointment over the sentence, however. Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Barbara Johnson put Gracian on three years felony probation and ordered him to perform 200 hours of community service, undergo counseling and to stay away from the Glendale shelter and all Los Angeles animal control facilities.

"It was not the sentence I was hoping for," said Glendale City Councilman Bob Yousefian. "I'm very disappointed. I think somebody who does what he did should have spent some time in jail so he could think about all the cruelty he did."

About two dozen of the animals found at Gracian's home had died. Most were

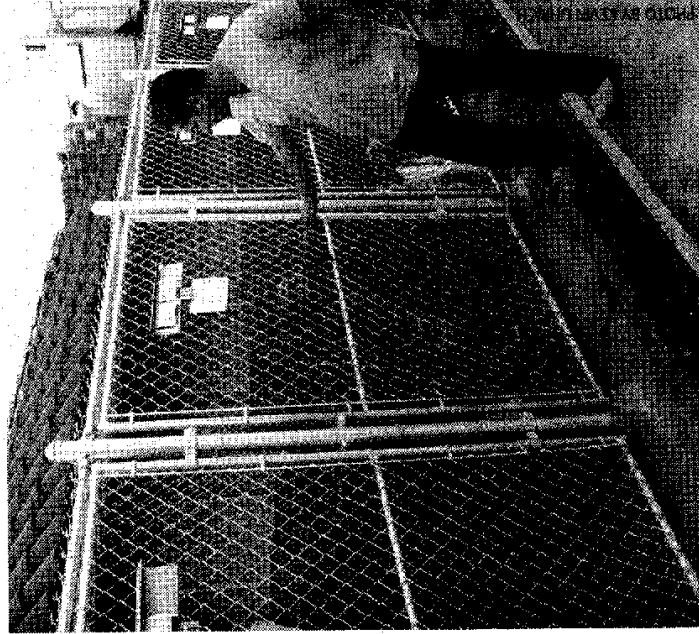
malnourished and dirty. But Gracian's animal collecting and theft were only part of the problems at the shelter. Record keeping was lax. Animals were kept in unclean kennels and were otherwise poorly cared for.

The troubles were discovered after Glendale's contract with the Humane Society to provide animal control lapsed in June. The city has since been working with the shelter on a month-to-month basis.

Management at the shelter changed in early January. Fred DeLange, formerly of the Burbank animal shelter, took over as general manager.

"There's been a lot of progress," Yousefian said.

"They're doing a lot more work. They're more pro-active than what the previous



Glendale Humane Society Kennel Manager Tyrone Aburto at work.

shelter was."

"One of the biggest problems was the training problem," DeLange said. "A lot

of the folks weren't being trained." But both Yousefian and DeLange agreed that part of the larger problem is that there is no agency to oversee shelters.

"Although I am not a strong believer in Big Brother, I would say that in this situation there needs to be some government oversight, especially statewide," said Yousefian. "We found that a lot of other agencies are having the same problem."

Dr. Jana Martin, a spokesperson for the Los Angeles County Psychological Association, said that while she could not immediately diagnose Gracian, people who collect large numbers of animals literally cannot see that their behavior as being harmful to themselves and the animals.

"They rationalize — irrationally — that the animals are better off with them," she said. "The original motivation for collecting the animals is very possibly that [the collector] did want to protect them or save them."

McNall thinks that the new Glendale shelter management should be given a chance. As to whether the city will contract with the Glendale Humane Society, Yousefian took a wait and see stance.

"We dropped the ball and I will be the first to admit it," Yousefian said about the council's lax oversight of the shelter.

"We're on top of it now and we're going to follow up and there will be oversight, whether [the Glendale Humane Society] gets a contract or not."

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