



## Animal shelter under new leadership starting today

Mar. 22--Martha Ellerbrook's taking a job about as easy as herding cats.

Ellerbrook will take over Lubbock's troubled animal services department today, bringing, the city hoped, some stability and renewed purpose for the scandal-dogged operation.

A morbid kill rate and morale challenges wait the former city chemist and facilities supervisor who has had her own struggles with city government.

Shelter employees have dealt with the euthanasia of thousands of animals a year and scrutiny over illegal practices tied to the destruction of so many animals. They have faced uncertainty over to whom, and, as Lubbock proceeds on a new shelter site, where they report to work.

Interim Animal Services Director Bill Howerton hoped her presence would offer a steadying hand for the department.

"Trying to get some stability for the guys, more than anything," Howerton said. "Get somebody here in place that's going to stay and put their program in place."

Ellerbrook shed no light on just how she would tackle the problems that waited for her as her start date approached. She did not return requests for comment after suffering an accident early last week.

But the challenges were well known.

Lubbock spent more than a year trying to find a new home for the department and to abandon its old, odorous facility at Municipal Drive and Ash.

High-profile changes of location and heart sparked public frustration with council and the shelter project.

Residents questioned price tags that reached as high as \$6 million -- supported with a private donation -- as Lubbock settled on a site in a southeast industrial area.

Then the city fired animal services director Kevin Overstreet in November after discovering employees had worked months or years without proper certifications under his watch.

Employees continued the euthanasia as waves of animals threatened to overwhelmed aging shelter facilities and shorthanded workers at the aging shelter facility.

City employees euthanized animals at a rate of no less than 108 a month -- the city destroyed 728 animals in July. City records reported 4,421 cats and dogs euthanized between the first of January and the end of November in 2009.

Less than half as many animals returned to their homes or found new Lubbock owners in 2009, according to the records.

Animal officers struggled under the certification problems without even knowing the full scope of the problem, according to e-mail correspondence released to The Avalanche-Journal in December.

Some officers committed hundreds, some thousands of misdemeanor offenses for continuing euthanasia procedures without proper certification.

Lubbock fired an employee for an improper euthanasia involving an animal that survived the procedure and was left unattended.

The city had already moved to correct its certification problems, assistant city manager Quincy White said.

The city hired four animal control officers in January who continue to train to work alone fetching stray or dangerous animals from city streets.

Extra manpower should help residents notice a faster response to their complaints, Howerton said.

Bringing in a full-time director would let that manpower better focus on their job, he said.

"This has become a 24/7 operation," Howerton said. "It's just a matter of having help."

The new director brings her own controversy with the city.

Ellerbrook sued the city in federal court in June 2009, alleging Lubbock officials discriminated against her in the past because she assisted her husband's lawsuit against the city.

Terry Ellerbrook was demoted from head of water utilities and then fired in 2005. The city settled his suit in 2007.

Adam Voyles, her attorney, said last Tuesday her new job would not end her ongoing lawsuit.

"The fact that the city has rehired Mrs. Ellerbrook does not excuse their past retaliation," Voyles said. "You can't retaliate against somebody, or discriminate against somebody or treat somebody unfairly, and then turn around after a lawsuit's been filed, several years later, and expect them not to be compensated for your past misconduct."

To comment on this story:

[elliott.blackburn@lubbockonline.com](mailto:elliott.blackburn@lubbockonline.com) | 766-8722

[charles.reinken@lubbockonline.com](mailto:charles.reinken@lubbockonline.com) | 766-8706

Trying to clean up a mess

In recent years, animal shelter workers have:

--Euthanized thousands of animals rather than be overwhelmed.

--Euthanized many of those without proper certification.


--Struggled to understand the certification process.

To see more of the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, or to subscribe to the newspaper, go to <http://www.lubbockonline.com/>. Copyright (c) 2010, Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, Texas Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services. For reprints, email [tmsreprints@permissionsgroup.com](mailto:tmsreprints@permissionsgroup.com), call 800-374-7985 or 847-635-6550, send a fax to 847-635-6968, or write to The Permissions Group Inc., 1247 Milwaukee Ave., Suite 303, Glenview, IL 60025, USA.

© Copyright 2010 LexisNexis. All rights reserved.

© Copyright 2010 Lubbock Avalanche-Journal

You may not repost, republish, reproduce, package and/or redistribute the content of this page, in whole or in part, without the written permission of the copyright holder.

 Close Window

Copyright © 1999 - 2009 AllBusiness.com, Inc. All rights reserved.

Use of this site is governed by our Terms of Use Agreement and Privacy Policy. Copyright 2010 Lubbock Avalanche-

Journal © LexisNexis 2010. LexisNexis Terms & Conditions | LexisNexis Privacy Policy

Copyright © 2009 LexisNexis, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.