

Former Boulder City shelter manager accused of needlessly killing animals



Boulder City Animal Control Shelter, 810 Yucca St., is shown Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2015. A now-retired Boulder City animal shelter supervisor was under criminal investigation earlier this year for illegally torturing and killing animals. Jeff Scheid/ Las Vegas Review-Journal Follow @jlscheid

By Ben Botkin and Bethany Barnes © 2015 Las Vegas Review-Journal



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BOULDER CITY — Everything was ready for the arrest. A frantic phone call had prompted a Boulder City police detective to investigate whether the city's head of animal control had, just for fun, been killing animals in the city's shelter.

What he found had him ready to arrest her for killing 91 animals in just one year.

Detective David Olson had interviewed people who worked with Animal Control Supervisor Mary Jo Frazier. He had perused the ledger where she wrote the names of animals she killed in red ink. He had contacted the city's veterinary clinics and learned they had only seen a handful of animals from the shelter, despite a city requirement that any animal being euthanized first be examined. And he had dug up a 2009 memo from a former city manager questioning why Frazier was killing so many animals.

Olson, who could not be reached Tuesday for comment for this article, drew up paperwork to arrest Frazier on felony and gross misdemeanor charges, but days later the case simply died.

Frazier retired two days after Olson finished his investigation, which made the case against her a "moot point," said Police Chief Bill Conger, who supervises animal control and its shelter.

"We could drag this thing through the mud and it really doesn't accomplish anything. It doesn't accomplish anything. She has no longer any authority to do anything with animals," Conger told the Review-Journal on Tuesday. "What does it accomplish when she was allowed to do that for several years before I even got here? When we discovered it here, we started to do something about it."

Conger said Olson "got a little bit ahead of himself." The chief said that he himself showed Boulder City Attorney David Olsen the investigation and that Olsen said felony charges would not stick, though "maybe a couple of misdemeanors" would.

"Why go forward with something that's not going to go very far, number one, and number two, when she resigned this whole thing stopped," Conger said.

But City Attorney Olsen said that the police never consulted him on the case and he doesn't know why Conger says otherwise.

Frazier sold her house in Las Vegas shortly after she retired and may have moved out of state. Efforts to locate her for comment were unsuccessful.

Frazier's ex-husband, Jeff Frazier, said he doesn't understand why Mary Jo Frazier was allowed to escape criminal charges and collect retirement.

Frazier said that after their divorce, she went after his dachshund, Oscar.

"She euthanized him. She stuck him," he said, adding that he never pursued charges. "You know, she was animal control supervisor. She just took him to work and put him down.

"With all the proof and information they've got on her, I don't know why they haven't gone down to arrest her and charge her with these things," he said. "I don't know if it is the chief not wanting to bring a bunch of negative publicity."

Conger said avoiding embarrassment wasn't a factor.

Investigation starts

The call that started the investigation came on April 4. Boulder City Animal Control Officer Ann Inabnitt told police that Frazier, her supervisor, didn't want to provide medical care to Lotus, an abused 11-week-old pit bull suffering from shattered teeth, a swollen head and a broken left hip. Frazier's reason, her co-worker told police, was "we don't spend money on pit bulls and because I'm just going to stick her anyway," according to the detective's affidavit to support an arrest warrant.

Problems persisted. Frazier refused to put the pit bull on the veterinarian-recommended diet of soft food, records show. Police then transported Lotus to the Boulder City Animal Hospital, with orders not to release the dog to Frazier or anyone else, without Conger's permission.

Police moved swiftly to arrest Gary Ortiz in connection with the pit bull's injuries. He faces a pending felony charge of willfully torturing or maiming an animal.

Arresting Frazier, however, was a different matter.

Investigation widens

Jenny Silvia, a shelter volunteer, told police she was concerned in part because Frazier wanted to euthanize Molly, a healthy, but hearing-impaired Australian shepherd. The volunteer adopted the dog, telling police that Frazier "finds joy in killing animals."

Evidence went beyond co-worker complaints. There was a paper trail. Police seized a log book showing when animals were checked into the shelter back to 2006, when Frazier was promoted to shelter supervisor. She had been with the city since 1996, starting as a part-time employee.

Each euthanization was documented in red ink. Adoptions were documented in black ink. Police used it to determine that almost half of the animals received since 2006 were euthanized by Frazier. That appears a little low, according to statistics compiled by the American Humane Association. In 1997, the association surveyed 1,000 shelters nationwide and determined that about 64 percent of animals were killed after they were accepted. However, the association noted that in many cases the shelters were overcrowded and needed to make room for more animals — conditions not seen in Boulder City.

In Boulder City, animals were euthanized quickly in a process that flouted two parts of city code, the investigation found. City code states that unlicensed animals are to be held for five days before being euthanized.

The log shows most of the animals were euthanized the day they arrived, the police affidavit states.

City code also requires a veterinarian's examination of an impounded animal before it can be killed, but clinics that do so under city contracts reported seeing only a handful of animals from the shelter. One had seen five animals in four years, the other just four.

In one instance, Frazier euthanized six kittens the same day they were received because they had "kennel cough" and she didn't want to medicate them, the affidavit states.

Frazier also instructed a staffer not to advertise available pets on a website.

"Mary Jo is neither qualified, nor has the proper medical equipment at the animal shelter to be taking it upon herself to systematically exterminate almost half of the animals that are received at the animal shelter for care and shelter," the detective wrote in the affidavit.

Inabnitt, who now supervises the shelter, said it wasn't her place to comment on Frazier. She did say that in her 30 months as a shelter worker, she never saw the facility at its 100-animal capacity.

The shelter takes in an average of about 600 animals a year, Inabnitt told the Boulder City Review in October, and now adopts out roughly 90 percent of them.

"I don't just kill animals," she said Tuesday. "It's not going to ever happen again."

And as for the battered puppy that started it all?

Lotus made a full recovery. Police arranged an adoption.

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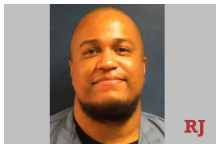
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