

Ferret Rescues in the News

CALL TO AFA LEADS TO LARGE-SCALE RESCUE IN HAGERSTOWN

By Faith Hood

On July 23, the AFA received a phone call from an animal control officer at the Washington County (Maryland) Humane Society. The officer was concerned about 76 ferrets due into the Humane Society in two days; as most humane societies are not equipped to handle this large of a business of ferrets, she was afraid they would be put to sleep. She was only able to give us a bit of information on the origin of the ferrets; luckily it was enough for us to work with.

I immediately contacted one of my fellow rescuers, Barbara Clay of Rocky's Ferret Rescue, whom I knew could get to the bottom of this. By 8 p.m., Barbara had spoken with the animal control officer scheduled for the rescue two days later. Barbara quickly assembled volunteers, some to set up cages and others to start a major fund-raising effort—a rescue of this size easily costs thousands of dollars. Thankfully, Barbara had an entire building in which to quarantine the ferrets. Over the next two days, I was able to procure food donations from Path Valley and the Ferret Store. I contacted Save Our Shelters (SOS), who was kind enough to cover the costs of testing each ferret for Aleutian Disease Virus (ADV). That accomplished, I began to contact neighboring shelter/rescues to see who would be able to take a few following the quarantine.

Animal Control agreed to allow Barbara Clay and her vice president, Kim Sikorski, to join them in picking up the ferrets. Large rescues being nothing new to either of these women, both were prepared with plenty of cages, bedding, food and water, and other supplies, including a camera to document the rescue. On the morning of July 25, the rescue group arrived at Frosty Paws, a breeder in Hagerstown, Maryland. The owner of Frosty Paws, Di Bachman, had been

cited for zoning violations, doing business in a residential neighborhood. Upon the team's arrival, only 62 of the 76 ferrets remained; the status and whereabouts of the other 14 are still unknown. From the women's descriptions and as evidenced by their photographic record of the rescue (www.pooflinger.com/hagerstownrescue), the conditions were far from ideal. An investigation of animal cruelty/neglect is in progress.



At right, photos illustrating the poor conditions of Frosty Paws shelter.

Top: Hobs in tiny quarters.

Bottom: Kits sleeping in a filthy playpen.

All photos courtesy Barbara Clay.

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The story of the rescue was televised by a local Hagerstown channel, Washington DC Fox Channel 5, and a Baltimore news station, and reported in the *Washington Post*.

This is not the first dealing the rescue world has had with Di Bachman and Frosty Paws. Back in 1998, my then-new shelter was approached to do a rescue for her. This was a surrender and no county officials were involved. At that time, the conditions, though not ideal, were much better than what was viewed (and smelled) on July 25. Still, the AFA was contacted about the shelter's conditions. In 1998, after conducting its own investigation, the AFA concluded that Bachman had dumped many sick and infirm ferrets on the shelter community, some of them with behavior problems, while continuing her breeding operation. On that basis, the AFA banned Di Bachman and Frosty Paws from attending any AFA-sanctioned event. The next year, as no portions of the original complaint had been rectified, the ban was increased to a lifelong ban.

Public awareness of rescues such as Hagerstown is important for a

Below, one of the rescued: a six-month-old champagne female, unnamed, peers uncertainly from her cage.



The garage in which the ferrets were housed was heavily damaged by mice. Above, insulation, filled with mouse feces, hung loosely from the ceiling.

number of reasons. First, the heroic efforts of Barbara Clay and her wonderful volunteers illustrates the importance of ferret shelters, and how much they depend on volunteer support. It also shows the importance of having a national ferret organization in place, such as the American Ferret Association. Were it not for national recognition of the AFA, the original Washington County Humane Society employee would not have known whom to call. She alone could not have activated shelter support the way the AFA did with Rocky's Rescue.

The mess at Hagerstown should also prompt some questions, chiefly, "How many ferrets is too many?" The question applies equally to breeders, shelters/rescues, and ferret owners. How many is too many? Do you have the time to care for and let all your ferrets run each day? Do you have the funds to get their yearly vaccinations, ADV tests, and medical care, including surgeries?

A rescue of this size puts an unbelievable burden on the rescue system; it's a ripple effect. The burden starts at Rocky's Rescue, but it's going out to all of us surrounding her. In the summertime, it's hard enough trying to fit three extra ferrets into the shelter—but 62? Think about it.

These large-scale efforts should also encourage all rescues and breeders to get to know each other. Networking is the only way to accomplish a large rescue. If you are a breeder, talk to your neighboring ferret shelters. Rescues, get to know other ferret rescues; you need to work together. A ferret rescue going under brings the same results as a breeder: a large quantity of ferrets to place quickly. If you're struggling, know when to ask for help; don't let the situation get as bad as it did with Frosty's Paws. With prior awareness and help from neighboring rescues, the Hagerstown debacle could have been prevented.

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As for the adopting public, you are not without responsibility; you are the front line to spot potential problems. It is your responsibility to ask for ferret histories. Bear in mind, though, that the shelter world often offers no known history—that's the nature of our business. But a breeder should have papers and parents to see. Ask to see the facility where the ferrets live. If you

aren't allowed to see the facility, that's a big red flag. If you ever suspect abuse or neglect, contact the local officials immediately. We cannot let such devastating situations continue for our beloved ferrets.

Faith Hood is the AFA Shelter/Rescue Committee Director and the director of Ferrets R #1 Shelter and Rescue.

Below, top: thankful ferrets who made it out on the second rescue, in Wolfsville.

Bottom: From Hagerstown, a mom and five kits in a cramped cage with no food or water.



AFA Spotlight on Service: Tara Palaski

By Faith Hood

On July 23, Tara was quick on the ball and I want to thank her. She received a call about a breeder in Hagerstown who has gotten herself in trouble. Tara took down the information and tried to contact me in every way she knew. After she finally got ahold of me around 4:30 p.m., I contacted shelters in the area closest to Hagerstown to see who had the resources and space to take part in the rescue and the housing/care of the ferrets.

By 8:30 p.m., Barbara Clay and her volunteers had been able to prepare space for the 76-plus ferrets. We have Animal Control helping us on Friday morning, and hope to gain access to the house (the ferrets are in a shed and three neighbors complained) because we are afraid more are in there. Since this is a repeat offender in breeding and dumping, we want them all this time.

So we have a quarantine area set up; we will get United ADV tests run this weekend and into Monday. We are trying to get the funds to get this done, as well as to administer the first round of distemper vaccines. Once we know the results, we can start to divide the ferrets between the rescues. With any luck, we'll be able to raise enough funds for all the vaccines and spay/neuters.

If not for the quick actions of Tara after she took the call, this situation couldn't have been resolved as quickly as it was. It's things like this that exemplify the way AFA steps up to bat for the ferret community—acts such as Tara's, in making a phone call and relaying information, that are, unfortunately, often overlooked. Thanks to both Tara and the AFA, for all that you do.

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FROM BARBARA CLAY, SEPTEMBER 9

We have the Wolfsville, MD 18 yet to alter, but our vet chose this time, after 15 years at Falls Rd Animal Hospital, to open his own practice. I needed a breather in dealing with post-ops with these kids. Many struggled, and three died. The three told a story in their death: neglect and abuse. It is being documented by the vets and included in the Felony charging documents to the Commissioner against Diana Bachman.

Thank you for the offer of doing the article. Their story needs to be told.

AFTER THE RESCUE: A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

Diane Campbell (of Ferret Guardian Rescue Haven) and I just returned from a weekend trip to Rocky's to help out with the rescue.

We found the conditions at the shelter very clean; there was hardly any odor. Barb Clay and the volunteers already there, Jade, Gail, and LeeAnne, were overworked, tired, and still going.

While we were there, the ferrets were each bathed (again), described, and given identification cards to match what is kept in the book about them. Medical or triage assessment was accomplished in full. Serious health problems were taken to the vet immediately. Spays and neuters have begun. Cages have been cleaned and, thanks to a wonderful donation of both time and linoleum (from another volunteer named Karen), all wire shelves on the cages were covered. As many

lock crocks as were available were placed in the cages, and cages were made better for the ferrets and easier for the caretakers to maintain.

It was truly amazing how well everyone worked together for some unbelievably long, grueling hours. There were three shelter moms working side by side. All talents were put to doing what they did best, and no one had a problem with it.

The ferrets were and are wonderful. They are beautiful and pitiful. One poor boy will need to be sedated to even get a good health exam. Many problems were found, including cardio, vaginal infections, prespuce, hematomas and/or tumors, eye discharges, anemia, jills in heat, a d lymphoma. Everyone, please keep in mind, the ADV testing, vaccinations, spays, and neuters are just the tip of the iceberg of the medical needs and costs.

Things most needed at the shelter:

1. Volunteers to clean cages and handle ferrets.
2. Prayers.
3. Cases of paper towels.
4. Bedding, old sheets, and towels. These guys do not yet know they are not supposed to potty on them, so old bedding for now. Nice hammies, though.
5. Lock crocks for food. They don't think dishes should hold food.
6. Water bottles.
7. Wood stove chips.
8. Donations to SOS or directly to the vet.

There were already over 50 ferrets at the shelter before this rescue. Add 62 more, and it takes a

very long day just to get the cages cleaned. That leaves no time for play, meds, special needs, handling, etc. Soon, people will stop coming as the news gets old and settles in the back of their minds, and then Barb will be left to do this on her own. All locals to that area, please volunteer; this is an ongoing need and will be for some time.

— From an August 5, 2003
FML post by Karen Douglas
(kdouglas1@ec.rr.com)

MORE ON DI BACHMAN

Last year, MKARESQ hosted a ferret show in Michigan. Di Bachman attended this show, sponsored a ring, showed ferrets (for which she received Best-of-Show), and had a table. Not one person told us that she had been ousted from the AFA or that she had dumped her ferrets. If we had known this, she would not have been allowed to attend our show.

This year, the organization that I belong to, Michigan Ferret Rescue & Adoption Network, Inc., hosted a show. Di Bachman was contacted and was even going to sponsor a ring. Again, no one came forward to tell us that we should have concerns about her. It was not until I read about the Hagerstown incident that all the dirt was revealed.

In light of this, she will never be allowed to attend our shows. We will ban her from any and all functions relating to ferrets. What she has done is despicable.

— From a September 26, 2003
FML post by Mary G. Newton
(sirk6@email.msn.com)