

ALL IN A Day's Work



Animal Services Officer Julie Bastian sometimes deals with animals in the entertainment business, as she does above, with Dakota the chimp. Dakota's owner was going through the application process. "Some of the animals I deal with could harm me, but not Dakota," Julie says. "She kept looking at my lips. And then she kissed me."

Got a Permit for That Buffalo?

■ **Animal Services employee Julie Bastian never knows what her day will bring. But safety for the public and for the animals remains her highest priority.**

"I will always remember the buffalo downtown," says Julie Bastian, recalling her most unusual stories after five years of running the Animal Services Permits Division with Officer Clarence Clegg. "There I was at six in the morning, for a commercial.

"That could be a real public safety issue, with buffalo running downtown! So I was there monitoring it. But it ended up being good for the animals, too. There wasn't enough water, and I said, 'We'll end this.' So they trucked in more water. [The producers] just needed to be reminded."

"But the animals used in the entertainment business tend to be well taken care of," she explains.

She and Officer Clegg are in the business of the animal business—making sure that animals that are used for business are well taken care of and managed within the law. That means she is deeply involved with pet shops, grooming parlors, kennels, boarding stables, riding academies, rodeos ... and animals used in the entertainment business.

"We make sure the animals are being treated properly. And because we are officially public safety officers, I always need to make sure the public is being kept safe. Public safety is important to us."

That's important, she says, because people don't have a good sense of the power of exotic animals.

"I was monitoring a special event in front of the Virgin Megastore. It was the opening for a movie, *The Mummy Returns*. There were camels outside. It's an amazing thing, telling people to stay away from the camels.

"People believe that what's on TV is real. I would never walk up to a wild animal and try to pet it, but people were trying to pet the camel. 'Why are you trying to pet an eight-foot-tall creature?' I asked them. Some of the animals I deal with can really harm me, or anybody. So while I have to protect the animals, I also have to protect the people, too."

She remembers the *Mummy Returns* event as another unusual experience.

"It seems the doorway at the Virgin Megastore was not big enough for the camels to enter the store," she laughs. "So the animal handlers put three camels into a freight elevator. I walked up

the stairs to meet the elevator at the top."

"Well, the door opens, and they're not there! It was completely empty! *How do you lose three camels in an elevator?*" she pleads.

"Apparently, the handler discovered that three camels wouldn't fit, so he gave up and walked them back to the trailer."

That might be the fun and unusual aspect of her job, but most of what she does involves working with small business.

"Trying to get people to comply with the law is probably the toughest challenge," Julie explains. "Getting things labeled properly at pet stores, especially. We need to know what they have in the cage, and it has to be labeled. That seems like such a simple thing, but sometimes I have to take them to the City Attorney to force them to label their cages properly and to make sure they let me know who is buying exotic animals.

"It's rare that I get to a pet store and find that nothing needs to change. Almost always, something needs to be done. Even if it's minor."

Another major challenge is nothing new to City employees—getting everything done with a small staff and within budget.

"There are so many applications pending, but there are only two of us ..." she says, her voice trailing off. "I'd like to get out of the office twice a year for spot checks, but now I get out maybe just once.

"We have such a skeleton staff, they just keep cutting our budget. Our work keeps going up, but we can do only so much."

It also bothers her that Animal Services is not always recognized for the good work that it does.

"We're part of the Dept. Air Rescue Team, or DART. We airlift horses when they fall down cliffs, for example.

"We love working with the LAFD, even though they get most of the credit for those operations. Most people don't realize that it's me down the cliff, putting the harness on the horse.

"And our Special Enforcement Unit, too," Julie continues. "All they do all day is catch dogs, preventing dogs from attacking people. That's very important."

Still, it has its joys.

"Every time we meet somebody we educate them. We even hand out coupons for spaying and neutering. We try to help as much as we can."

And even though she spends a lot of time in the office, facilitating the permit process, she is always on call for animal rescue.

"I helped rescue a huge bull mastiff puppy once," she remembers, "and the owner hugged me. I just love that. I made a difference.

"I make a difference every day."

Latino Heritage at the Zoo

The L.A. Zoo will be celebrating Latino Heritage throughout the park with various ethnic activities for the entire family. Come watch colorful children's dance groups, enjoy mariachi music, make festive crafts and learn interesting facts about the Zoo's animals and plants from Latin America. Regularly scheduled

piñata-breakings for children will result in mementos of a day spent at the Zoo.

The festivities are scheduled for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 18 and 19, at the Zoo in Griffith Park.

For more information, visit the Zoo's Website, www.lazoo.org, or call (323) 644-4200.



Twelve-year-old Cece DaHaro gets a close look at the San Esteban Island chuckwalla at the L.A. Zoo. The lizard is one of the animals that will be featured at the annual Latino Heritage Celebration.

Commission Approves Plan to Pick Up Stolen Vehicles

■ **Quality and Productivity Commission applauds DOT plan to use civilian traffic officers to pick up stolen vehicles.**

The City of Los Angeles' Quality and Productivity Commission announces its strong support and encouragement for a new pilot program to be addressed by the City Council Aug. 17. The program is aimed at freeing police officers for patrol activities. Set to begin on Oct. 1 in approximately half of the City, civilian traffic officers instead of police officers will identify, retrieve and process stolen vehicles on LA's streets.

"This is exactly the kind of project our Commission sought out and pushed," explained Quality and Productivity Commissioner Howard Ekerling. "The Department of Transportation embraced the idea, knowing that their workers are more likely than police officers to find a stolen vehicle while on patrol. They understand what wasted effort it is to give these vehicles a parking ticket rather than working to get them back to their owners. And the Police Department realized how this would allow officers to devote more time to patrol, rather than waiting for a tow truck to impound a car. Everyone realized that recovered stolen vehicles will be returned more quickly to their owners."

The Commission endorsed the effort during 2003 and has actively advocated for its implementation with managers of both the



Department of Transportation and of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Concludes Quality & Productivity Commission President Julie Butcher: "This is a great idea. It frees up the City's police officers to concentrate on police duties. Traffic officers spend their entire workday out on the streets of the City and are clearly more likely to find vehicles that are stolen. And when traffic officers come upon these vehicles, they are much more likely to still have their radios and tires intact. This is a way the City can increase service to its residents without adding a cent to the cost of services."

The City Council was expected to approve the pilot on its regular agenda.