

## The Sweet, Remarkable 'Ma'dear'

### ■ The City loses Animal Services Commissioner Helen Ann Johnson, who died Sept. 28.

By Jackie David, Public Information Director, Animal Services



Helen Ann Johnson  
1930 – 2004

She was born in a little town in Louisiana Nov. 2, 1930, the youngest of six children born to the late Jesse Sr. and Garnie Atkins. Her name was Helen Ann Atkins and she was destined for greatness.

Helen Ann Atkins' life was one full of uphill

challenges – challenges that molded her into one of the City's ever-so-humble and ever-so-great movers and shakers.

In 1952, Helen Ann married Douglas Johnson. They raised three daughters: the late Connie Mitchell, Thenor Lynn and Nikki Lavette. They moved to Los Angeles, where Helen Ann retired as a beautician.

Helen Ann became a local activist for the community she loved. She was member to a host of groups in South Los Angeles, amazing her community and her City with her energy and commitment. She was a Commissioner at L.A. Animal Services. She had the ear of the City's mayors and councilmembers.

People said that if anyone could get Los Angeles City parks cleaned up, Helen Ann could. She did. People said that if anyone could drag the mayor down to the corner of Florence Avenue to look at a flooded area, Helen Ann could. She did. People said that if anyone could get the name "South Central Los Angeles" changed to "South Los Angeles," Helen Ann could. She did. People said that if anyone could stand up to an ugly and terrorizing Animal Rights Group, Helen Ann could. She did.

The City of Los Angeles lost sweet Helen Ann Johnson Sept. 28.

On Oct. 6, people lined up at the Calvary Baptist Church in Santa Monica to bid farewell to one of L.A.'s best.

Former L.A. City Mayor Richard Riordan affectionately spoke of Helen Ann to the crowd gathered at the church: "She physically dragged me to Florence Avenue to show me a flooded area and said, 'Now, do you suppose people in Brentwood have this?' He called her a "goddess." The former Mayor also recalled how she made it a project to clean up and beautify all City parks – beginning with the one in her neighborhood – and how she made him do it.

Mayor Jim Hahn, who stayed the entire morning at the funeral, also spoke ever so fondly and affectionately of Helen Ann, talking about how if anyone could get anything done, it would be Helen Ann. He spoke of her great servitude and of her dignity.

Councilmember Jan Perry choked back tears as she spoke of this feisty yet ever-so-humble woman whose years were dedicated to serving her community. She brought a chuckle when she recalled that if Helen Ann asked you to do something, you had better do it – or have a good back up plan if you planned to say "no." And even that might not work. She also recalled what a great cook Helen Ann was: how she baked the best coconut pies and how former Councilmember Nate Holden humbly visited Helen Ann just to ask for her coconut pies.

Men and women, young and old, all stood up to tell their story. Those close to Helen Ann called her "Ma'dear." One after the other talked about how you had better do what "Ma'dear" asked or you would get a "whooping." They talked about how, if you ever needed anything, anything at all, "Ma'dear" would be there for you. She cooked and she fed. If you had no food, she would see to it that you and your family would have your food. Yet, Helen Ann always told those who came to her that "a man who doesn't work, doesn't eat."

Everyone wanted to be part of Helen Ann's family – black, white, yellow, young, old, middle-aged, rich, poor, famous or not – it didn't matter. Everyone wanted to share that if anyone was important to Helen Ann, they were. Everyone wanted to lay claim to being her daughter, her son, her grandson, her granddaughter, and her dearest friend.

A gentleman gathered the courage to stand up and speak and this is what he said: "When I was down and out, Helen Ann was there for me. She fed me. She took care of me. She made me feel like the most important person in the world. I'm not even black, I'm Mexican ... and I'm her family." The church crowd smiled with understanding. "I will always, always honor her memory and make sure that people don't forget who 'Ma'dear' was."

That is the way this humble woman from humble beginnings moved and swayed Los Angeles with her baked pies and meals, her kindnesses, her nourishment of her fellow-beings' body and soul.

Whence cometh this remarkable woman who had the gift to respond to greatness, who knew the magic and secret of servitude, who understood it was a holy duty to bake her pies and nourish her kindred folk? Whence cometh this greatness cloaked in humility? This greatness was borne out of pain and understanding and steadfast courage to always be true to yourself and to others; to acknowledge with your life that we all are valuable no matter the color, the creed, the position, the title. This greatness was borne out of gentility, and kindness, servitude and dignity ... a greatness that Helen Ann Johnson truly exemplified as only she could in her own unique remarkable way.

Thank you Helen Ann. Thank you "Ma'dear." We will miss you

## New Animal Svs. GM

### ■ Guerdon Stuckey comes from Maryland to head department that's been in the news. Focus group helps in selection process.

On Sept. 27, Guerdon Stuckey was appointed to be the new General Manager of Animal Services by Mayor Jim Hahn.

Stuckey replaces Sharon Morris, who was appointed interim general manager after the departure of Jerry Greenwalt earlier this year.

"I am looking forward to welcoming Guerdon Stuckey as general manager of the Animal Services Department," the mayor said. "Guerdon's credentials and skills as a top-notch manager are exactly what the department needs to get itself back on track. I have great confidence in the experience and ability that Guerdon brings to the position – especially his experience in turning around troubled city departments."

"I am so pleased to join the City of Los Angeles as the new general manager of the Animal Services Department," Stuckey said. "The key to this job will be getting to know the community, the issues and the staff and making sure to address the particular concerns of each group."

The general manager for Animal Services oversees the department's six shelters located throughout Los Angeles, enforces animal-related laws and acts to prevent cruelty to animals. Since the start of his administration, Mayor Hahn has announced the City's commitment to a no-kill policy for all adoptable animals by 2008 and introduced the Spaymobile, which provides thousands of free and subsidized surgeries to pets in low-income areas.

Mayor Hahn created a multi-step process to find the new general manager. First, Mayor Hahn asked animal organizations in Los Angeles to come together in a focus group to develop a list of desired qualities in the next general manager. The focus group developed a job description that heavily emphasized strong management and communication skills. That job description was sent out nationwide and brought in more than 70 applicants for the position.

Mayor Hahn then appointed a smaller group of animal experts to form a search committee,

chaired by Madeline Bernstein, president of SPCA LA, to review all the applications and narrow the group down to 16 of the strongest candidates, who then went through the first round of interviews. The search committee sent a limited number of those candidates to the Mayor's office for final interviews conducted by Mayor Hahn, members of the City council and labor representatives. Mayor Hahn made the final decision in mid-September.

Stuckey was the director of neighborhood and community services for the City of Rockville, Maryland. Previously, he served as the assistant to the city manager for neighborhood services and assistant to the president of the Urban League in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"Guerdon has been an extremely important part of our management team," said Catherine Tuck Parrish, Rockville's acting city manager. "He has helped organize the divisions of our Department of Neighborhood and Community Services and brought outstanding leadership and new ideas to Rockville. All of the people he worked with will miss the enthusiasm he brought to our city."

"What the Department of Animal Services needs, above all else, is a great manager who can lead the organization down the right path. I have no doubt that Guerdon is that leader," said Mayor Hahn. "His extensive experience managing municipal organizations is exactly what we looked for in the new general manager."

"I had an opportunity to meet briefly with Mr. Stuckey and review his impressive work history. I look forward to working with him to improve the department's operations, employee morale and implementing policies, such as low kill/no kill," said Councilwoman Cindy Miscikowski.

"Clearly, with Guerdon Stuckey's wide range of expertise and passion for the position, I am confident that he is the right person to effectuate a positive change for the department and the stray animals in this city," said Bernstein.

Stuckey graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a Bachelor's degree in personnel and labor relations and received his Master's degree in public administration from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

The appointment is subject to approval by the City Council.



Guerdon Stuckey,  
General Manager of Animal Services



In the public service trailer were (from left): LAFD Chief William Bamattre and actors Joaquin Phoenix and John Travolta.

## Big-Screen Hero

### ■ LAFD Chief Bill Bamattre films a movie trailer with John Travolta and Joaquin Phoenix on smoke detector safety.

Joined by two recognizable friends of the LAFD—actors John Travolta and Joaquin Phoenix, currently starring in the feature film Ladder 49, Bamattre shares an important reminder for us all.

If you have a fast Internet connection, you can view the safety trailer online. To view the video now, simply follow the Windows Media or QuickTime links on the LAFD Home Page: <http://www.lafd.org>

Good job, Chief!

In October, cinema attendees across North America viewed a special Fire Prevention Week message from Los Angeles Fire Chief Bill Bamattre, reminding everyone of the safety of home smoke detectors.

