

# Seattle Post-Intelligencer

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## First Person: Animal shelter manager did a heckuva job

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**By MARCIA PEARSON**  
GUEST COLUMNIST

The disgraceful state of King County's animal shelters is nothing new. But for those following this story, outrage at the conditions at the shelters has been matched by astonishment at the way in which County Executive Ron Sims has handled the controversy.

Case in point: the recent promotion of acting shelter manager Al Dams.

Nearly a year ago, a citizens' advisory committee reported that the King County Animal Care and Control shelters were "deplorable." The advisory committee made clear that inhumane conditions were nothing new -- they had existed for more than a decade and had been ignored by county leadership.

The findings of the advisory committee were echoed by reports from two consultants. In March, shelter consultant Nathan Winograd found the shelters had suffered from "well over a decade's worth of neglect and poor leadership," observing that the animals did not even consistently receive food and water every day. In April, the county released a report from a team of veterinarians from the University of California-Davis Shelter Medicine program, which found not only a "breakdown in care leading to animal suffering and likely un-necessarily high levels of euthanasia and death," but also that the shelters posed a significant public health risk.

For more than two years, KCACC was supervised by Acting Manager Al Dams, who finally left this office June 30. Animal lovers across the county should cheer, and hope that the new acting manager is able to alleviate the suffering in KCACC's shelters.

But taxpayers should take a moment and reflect upon the fact that Dams was promoted. Yes, promoted -- to the position of Strategic Planner and Operational Development Manager for the county's Department of Records and Licensing, with inexplicable kudos from Sims for putting KCACC on track to become a "world-class facility." (Sims also praised Dams for "reducing euthanasia rates to historic lows," despite the fact that KCACC's statistics have been repeatedly questioned by community advocates, the County Council, and shelter consultants -- and are under investigation by the County Auditor's Office.)

As a taxpayer and longtime Sims supporter, I have to wonder: What does it take to be promoted in his administration?

Dams has presided over a national embarrassment; an animal shelter so inhumane that local advocates have called for it to be investigated for animal cruelty. He failed to implement fixes, despite an infusion of nearly \$1 million in additional money this spring, and plentiful guidance from local experts and professional consultants. The irony of Dams being put in charge of "strategic planning" is priceless.

Maybe the answer lies in old-fashioned cronyism. Public records reveal that Dams and his wife have

been loyal supporters of Sims since at least 2001. Just recently, Dams was a table captain for the kickoff breakfast for Sims's 2009 re-election campaign. Perhaps Sims has just been in power too long, and gotten too comfortable -- forgetting that county departments don't exist to serve his ego, and county jobs don't exist to employ his friends?

Before we cut public health clinics and sheriff's deputies in response to the \$70 million budget deficit, we should take a close look at how the county executive spends our money. Because where there is one Al Dams, there are sure to be more.

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