

New President Of California Ferret Group "Hopeful" For Ferret Legalization

The new president of Ferrets Anonymous has hopes for ferret legalization in the future.

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"It's going to be a busy year," said Lance M. (no last name is used to preserve his anonymity). He is the new president of Ferrets Anonymous, a statewide organization in California devoted to educating people about domestic ferrets with the ultimate goal of getting ferret ownership legalized in the state.

Step one may be educating Californians that ferrets are illegal to own as pets in the state. Many California residents remain ignorant of this fact. Lance himself has set up ferret information tables at local pet stores, and the No. 1 reaction of people who stop at these tables is, "I didn't know ferrets were illegal." This is something Lance and members of Ferrets Anonymous want to change.

Legalization History

The fight to have ferret ownership legalized in California began in the 1980s, and Lance is the latest person to lead the battle. Lance became president after a vote by FA members at the 15th annual Ferrets Anonymous Round-Up that took place March 29, 2008. He ran unopposed. The previous president, Claudia T., chose not to run. She had served nine years as president and six years as vice president. Lance said that "hopeful" best described his feeling after the announcement that he was FA president.

In 2004, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed legislation that would have made ferret ownership legalized. Schwarzenegger cited the lack of an Environmental Impact Report as the reason for his veto. In his veto message he stated, "I am concerned that there has not been proper study to determine whether ferrets are detrimental to the health and safety of California citizens and the environment." Currently, Lance sees an Environmental Impact Report as the best hope for ferret legalization. "If we can afford to do it, we should do it. We'll have to keep jumping through hoops to get [legalization] done."

Another reason he pins his hopes on an EIR is because of the science. "If you're going to attack an issue, the one thing you can't argue with is hard science."

But he's aware that many years of efforts have ended in failure. "I can see [legalization] not happening even if we got all our ducks in a row," he said.

How To Change People's Thinking

Lance repeatedly stressed the importance of education in bringing change. Not only to combat the image of the ferret issue as a joke among lawmakers, but to raise awareness among the general public. He sees the poll that came out last year stating that only 38 percent of California voters would support ferret legalization as more of a report card showing how good a job had been done educating people about ferrets. The resulting "grade" was an F, because only 38 percent approved, he said. The implication is that anyone who is educated about ferrets would support ferret legalization.

Lance plans to reach the general population of California by dispersing information on websites and ferret education tables statewide at festivals, fairs, pet stores, and other events. "At all these different venues, it doesn't cost that much to set up a table."

He envisions Ferrets Anonymous as the coordinating organization that would pay for the tables and then direct who does what, when. One weekend several chapters in one area of the state might operate a table at an event, the next weekend chapters in an adjacent area of the state would be at work. And it could be a regular event for chapter members to set up ferret education tables twice a month for four hours on a Saturday.

Changes For Ferrets Anonymous

Lance has many goals for Ferrets Anonymous in the next year. "I see a bunch of people who all have their heart in the right place, but don't necessarily organize well and might not be willing to speak up," he said. "I absolutely believe in a group that's governed by everyone." He sees the president as being there to organize efforts.

Lance wants to promote an open door policy, where everyone is eager to voice their ideas. He knows this will cause more work for him — requiring him to answer a lot of e-mails and rack up cell phone time — but said he's willing to do it.



He knows that fresh ideas can come from anyone, even the person who just joined the group.

"I'm hoping that the [FA] board will get real vocal, not argumentative, but vocal." To that end, he's set up a Yahoo group for board members alone. With all the members using this group to communicate, there's no worry about losing e-mails or missing out on a discussion. He's already sent a small list of to-do items to the board.

And what about the challenge of getting people to participate in a society where people face so many demands on their time? "Give people ownership," Lance said. If they have personal investment in a project, they really participate.

As for other changes at Ferrets Anonymous, Lance will be working on the statewide website and converting the newsletter into an electronic format as part of his plan to keep information flowing. The newsletter will be available online as a free PDF. The print format will remain available for a fee to cover printing and mailing costs. "Always keep information available to everyone," he said. "If you limit information, you kill a group."

Is he worried about suffering burnout? Not for years. "It's fun," he said. "Some of it is really challenging, but I hate not being challenged." He described several challenges he recently conquered. He founded OCFerrets in 2006 and single-handedly built the website by following HTML For Dummies and investing hundreds of hours of time. In 2007, he accepted the role of CEO of the California Domestic Ferret Educational Alliance. Director Bonnie T. and he got the paperwork rolling to create a true nonprofit organization that exists solely to educate and raise funds for ferret education efforts. Lance also runs the Loving Ferrets Forum, an online ferret forum with members across the United States and several other countries.

"I don't care if you don't like me. I'd like to be able to work with you," Lance said. His goal? "Get information flowing all over the group. You don't pooh-pooh anybody's ideas."