

## The Ferret Association of Connecticut Inc.

**With more than 1,200 ferrets saved, what are the secrets and successes behind the Ferret Association of Connecticut Inc.'s nearly 20-year history?**

*By Troy Lynn Eckart*

Posted: November 1, 2009, 5 a.m. EST

Photos courtesy Ferret Association of Connecticut Inc.

Mira (top) wasn't expected to survive when she arrived at the shelter, but she lived at FACT for six happy years. Many other ferrets, some shown in the bottom photo, have also passed through the doors of FACT, more than 1,200 and counting!

The Ferret Association of Connecticut Inc. is a ferret shelter in Hartford that started in 1991. L. Vanessa Gruden, shelter director, said that one secret to FACT's success and longevity is that it was established as a business, a nonprofit with business acumen behind it.

"My sister and I started it, and she had 30 years of business management, I had accounting and writing skills, and we brought those to the endeavor," Gruden said. "Too many good and well-meaning people start ferret shelters and think that working with the ferrets will be the biggest part of what you do — that's the least. I spend my time doing paperwork, raising money and dealing with adopters, surrenders and volunteers."

Another secret of success? "We learned early on that you cannot possibly save every ferret in need," Gruden said. "We do what we can for as many as we can. I maintain a life and work outside the shelter, both to keep my sanity and help with my personal income. And we pay staff, not much, but something. Few people who do this work are independently wealthy, and you can't survive putting all your own money into it."

More than 1,200 ferrets have passed through the doors of the shelter since it opened. Many ferrets came from large rescues from ferret breeders or animal hoarding cases. The average number of ferrets housed in the shelter is 25, with the foster program housing between 30 to 40 ferrets at any given time. The shelter has a fairly quick turnover, and ferret numbers and faces change weekly.

### Ferret Stories From The Shelter

Gruden cites Mira, the ferret featured on FACT's website, as its greatest success story. This is because Mira lived six happy years with them, in spite of the fact that Gruden said she should have died the first night she came to the shelter.

And Mira isn't the only ferret to find happiness at FACT. "I always feel rewarded when I see an animal enter our shelter and suddenly seem to come alive — to hop and run and play; clearly, it's the most wonderful place they've ever been," Gruden said. "I enjoy working with frightened and/or biting animals and seeing them learn to trust people."

But the endings aren't happy for every ferret. Perhaps the worst case Gruden saw began when a man phoned to say he'd found a ferret in a cage near a creek. He brought it to them. "We couldn't believe our eyes," Gruden said. "This little girl was so covered with dried feces that most of her hair had twisted into mats and had to be cut off. The cage stunk to high heaven. The inside of the water bottle was all algae, and the tiny, skinny creature's face was so swollen on either side that it looked like a hammerhead shark. She wheezed, barely able to breathe. I was truly horrified at her condition."

The ferret was cleaned and rushed to the veterinarian, who diagnosed her as having advanced cancer that was destroying her face. "The vet said we could put her down right away or give her a few days of love and care," Gruden said. The ferret was able to eat, so they chose to give her a few days of love. She was laid to rest soon after.