

# Nevada Too

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## Settlements set in federal lawsuit

### Clark County, agency cited in baby's death

By CARRI GEER THEVENOT  
LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

Four siblings of a slain foster child could receive a total of \$150,000 under settlement agreements reached in a federal lawsuit.

Another \$140,000 could go to the child's mother.

Morgan Charles, the mother of the 7-month-old child known as Baby Boy Charles, and her father, Christopher Charles, filed the lawsuit in 2007 against Clark County and the county's Department of Family Services.

"I think that it's a complicated situation, and it's a result that my clients are satisfied with," said Las Vegas attorney Marjorie Hauf, who represents the plaintiffs.

Christopher Charles, who never met his newborn grandson, sought custody of the infant after his daughter gave birth and decided she could not care for the baby.

"Legally he was Baby Boy Charles, but to her he was Alexander," Hauf said.

Also named as defendants were Melanie Ochs, the 43-year-old foster mother

### BABY BOY CHARLES

who is serving a sentence of 20 to 50 years in prison for murdering the infant, and her husband, Laurence Tokarski.

According to a joint status report, filed July 21 in U.S. District Court, Clark County has agreed to recommend that the Clark County Commission settle the claims for \$150,000 and pay \$20,000 in costs.

According to the report, the \$150,000 would be divided among Morgan Charles' four other children: Chelsea Charles, 4; Faith Wills, 9; Matthew Moore, 11; and Erin Moore, 12.

Christopher Charles, who lives in Indiana, is Chelsea's legal guardian. Chelsea was born while her mother was behind bars. The 30-year-old woman has served time in prison for burglary.

Hauf said Morgan Charles now lives in Indiana and is participating in Chelsea's care.

"She's really got her life on track," the lawyer said. "She's working. She's established herself in that community."

Hauf said Morgan Charles has no contact with her three other surviving children.

According to the status report, two insurance companies have agreed to pay Morgan Charles \$100,000 to settle the claims against Ochs and Tokarski, who

were dismissed from the case last week.

Another defendant, Maple Star Nevada, has agreed to pay Morgan Charles \$40,000. According to the lawsuit, the Department of Family Services contracted with Maple Star for the provision of foster care services, which included placing children with foster parents and monitoring children in foster care.

According to the status report, Hauf is attempting to locate Faith's father, Brian Wills, to inform him that Faith will be a beneficiary of the settlement and to set up for her a blocked trust, one typically created for minors to prevent improper use by their parents.

"Plaintiffs' counsel has contacted the adoptive parents of Morgan Charles' other two children, Erin Moore and Matthew Moore, to inform them that they will be beneficiaries of the settlement and to set up a blocked trust account for them," according to the status report.

According to the lawsuit, the county and Maple Star put Baby Boy Charles in a dangerous situation "when they placed him and allowed him to remain in the foster home of Melanie Ochs and Laurence Tokarski."

The infant died Aug. 4, 2006, of head trauma.

The county and Maple Star also failed to provide proper supervision and protection for the infant while he was in the foster home, according to the lawsuit.

**"When you can bring these issues to public attention, it causes people to behave better."**

MARJORIE HAUF  
ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFFS

In addition, according to the document, Clark County failed to provide training to foster care social workers and supervisors regarding the investigation and licensing of prospective foster parents, the selection of foster parents for particular foster children, and the supervision of foster children in foster homes.

The lawsuit accused Ochs and Tokarski of "failing to ensure that Baby Boy Charles was kept in an environment safe and secure for a child of his age, so that he could be returned to his mother pursuant to reunification efforts that should have been conducted by DFS and its caseworkers."

Hauf said the lawsuit brought serious concerns to light, and she hopes it has helped improve the county's foster care system.

"When you can bring these issues to public attention, it causes people to behave better," she said.

Contact reporter Carri Geer Thevenot at cgeer@reviewjournal.com or 702-384-8710.

## Psychic 'hears' pets' unspoken messages

### Animal communicator shares skills with public

By JESSICA FRYMAN

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

A floppy, oversized tongue sprung from Bruno's mouth as the shepherd-basset mix strutted on squatty legs over to his foster mom.

But the 5-year-old pup's "everything's cool, dude" attitude is just a front — at least according to Joan Ranquet, a pet psychic of sorts.

"He's really upset and has been for a while," said Ranquet of the dog she has been told is a rescue.

Although skeptics might call her "perception" common sense, she said her clients are amazed by the details their pets tell her.

The animal communicator, whose second book on the topic will be published next summer, is sharing her skills with the Las Vegas public this weekend. The Seattle woman is in town for a Las Vegas Valley Humane Society fundraiser, which included a speech and reception Friday evening and public pet readings today.

The society, a nonprofit organization, places animals with foster families until they can be adopted.

In her brief interaction with Bruno, Ranquet said he told her he misses a man from the family who was forced to move away and leave him behind.

Jen Hlavacek, dog coordinator at the society, shook her head in agreement as she revealed that the dog's previous owner had three adult sons who raised the animal.

Fifty-fifty chance? Ranquet calls it a skill in communication.

To the nonbeliever, there isn't much communication involved, though: Ranquet closes her eyes, quickly scrawling on a notecard whatever comes to her.

She said her senses aren't talent but a



Joan Ranquet, animal communicator, reads Bruno to find out what kind of home he wants someday. His foster mom, Jen Hlavacek, asks whether the 5-year-old shepherd-basset mix likes her other dogs. Ranquet is in town to do public readings to benefit the Las Vegas Valley Humane Society.

ALYSSA ORR  
LAS VEGAS  
REVIEW-JOURNAL

### EVER WONDER WHAT YOUR PET IS THINKING?

Owners can set up an appointment for a psychic reading with animal communicator Joan Ranquet by calling 463-8005. Readings will be held today at the Oquendo Center, 245 E. Oquendo St. The \$45 charge will be donated, in full, to the Las Vegas Humane Society.

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skill that pet owners unknowingly practice every day. "You know when you walk into a room and a dog is sad. That's telepathy. I just got really good at it."

In her communications with at least a

dozen species, she has learned dolphins think humans should stick together more, a dog told her the family's daughter struggled with homework, and one horse's fear to complete a water jump set in precisely four strides before the leap.

As if she were Miss Cleo, the animal communicator works best on phone call readings in which she looks at a pet's photograph.

Without face-to-snout interaction, the animal can't confuse her with shy or nervous antics.

This skeptical journalist showed off a cellphone picture of her 3-year-old bunny, Clyde, to test the claims, only to be startled by the details he "told" the complete stranger about my personal life.

"It improves the relationship with the

owner," Ranquet said of the communications. "Good relationships keeps animals in a 'forever home.'"

In search of that for Bruno, Hlavacek asked whether a single lady would make a suitable owner because one had made an offer in hopes the dog would be a protector.

"Protecting is not his main goal in life," Ranquet said. "I think food is more of his main goal. He's all about food."

That prediction seemed odd for a dog that hadn't yet sniffed out any mischief.

Soon enough, the stout fur ball balanced on his hind legs trying to reach a jar of treats on a table.

Food, a main priority indeed.

Contact Jessica Fryman at jfryman@reviewjournal.com or 702-383-0401.

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