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Embattled Riverhead animal control officer resigns

LAST UPDATED ON WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 2011 07:50
 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 2011 07:25

WRITTEN BY DENISE C

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Riverhead Town's controversial animal control officer has resigned.

The Town Board last night accepted ACO Lou Coronese's resignation effective 9/19.

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Coronesi resigned rather than face disciplinary charges brought against him for alleged unexcused absence from work for a period of several months, according to Riverhead Councilman James Wooten, the Town Board liaison to the animal shelter. A hearing had been set for Oct. 2.

The town has filled the ACO's duties with a part-time officer who has been acting as full-time, Wooten said, and would look to make a permanent full-time replacement as soon as possible.

Coronesi's resignation ends a nine-month saga touched off by Coronesi's order to put down a dog at the animal shelter on Dec. 21, 2010. Animal rights activists and shelter volunteers — long at odds with Coronesi over shelter management — complained to the Town Board that the dog's destruction was unnecessary. Coronesi's order was motivated by spite.

Supervisor Sean Walter initially defended the ACO. At the Jan. 5 Town Board meeting, he said the dog in question was determined to be dangerous because it "bit a child." That statement, which Walter later attributed to Coronesi, turned out to be untrue, according to county health department report. The health department report indicates that the dog bit his 22-year-old owner as the owner was attempting to break up a fight between him and another dog. The owner suffered three "superficial lacerations" to his hand, according to the report. Activists argued that the dog, Bruno, was making improvement despite his isolation at the town shelter, and that Coronesi conceded as much at a meeting the day before he gave the order to put the dog down.



Activists were also incensed that the town was employing an animal control officer who has a criminal record involving wildlife laws.

Gail Waller of Glen Cove, a donor to the shelter, at the Jan. 5 Town Board meeting read from a 2003 arrest report of the Arizona Fish and Game Department, which charged Coronesi with hunting without a license, unlawful possession of wild game, and unlawful possession of restricted wildlife.



According to the report, Coronesi was arrested in August 2003 after Arizona fish and game officers saw him putting a Gila monster in a pillow case in Bagdad, Ariz. Officers also found three tarantulas and a small diamond rattlesnake in plastic containers inside the vehicle Mr. Coronesi was driving, according to the report.

Coronesi later pleaded "no contest" to the charges, all misdemeanors.

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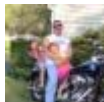
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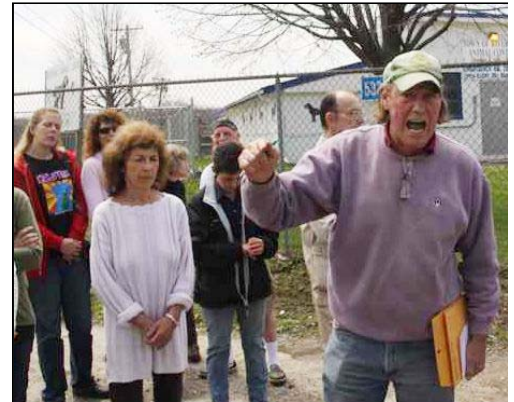
"This has a direct bearing on his ability to serve the town as a public employee charged with taking care of animals," Waller told the board, demanding his termination.

But the supervisor and Riverhead Police Chief David Hegermiller, Corone supervisor, didn't see it that way.

"Everything is cleared up. I fully trust his ability to deal with animals, especially dogs," Hegermiller said after the Jan. 5 meeting.

"Lou has my support 100 percent," Walter said in an interview. "He did so stupid. He paid his fine. It is over. It was over in 2003," Walter said.

Waller and fellow activists Patricia Lynch of Southampton and Sue Hansen of Rocky Point continued to pressure the board to fire Coronesi, speaking out at numerous board meetings. The supervisor's support of his employee eroded, and he pledged to take action to move Coronesi into a different town job. But then Coronesi went out on sick leave for reasons undisclosed to the public. Re: Calverton in April wrote to Suffolk County District Attorney Thomas Spota DA to investigate the situation.



Wooten said Coronesi had exhausted his available sick leave and vacation did not return to work despite requests to do so, according to the council. The town then commenced disciplinary proceedings which resulted in the ACC resignation.

Coronesi could not be reached for comment.

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Thank you Riverhead Local

written by Samantha , September 21, 2011

Thank you for your continued support of animal rights your coverage makes a difference. Thank you to Sue, Connie, Rex, Pat, RSVP Volunteers, animal advocates and the community for never giving up and following this through.

Sincerely,
 Samantha, RSVP Volunteer

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written by bill , September 21, 2011

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