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## Wild Animal Orphanage Update: Bye Bye Bubba

[Wild Animal Orphanage](#) endured yet another tough month, capped off with the euthanization of Bubba, the beloved White Tiger. The start of May brought new management, with husband-and-wife team Jamie and Michelle Cryer assuming the Director and Chairman of the Board slots, respectively, after the [board members fired Nicole Garcia as CEO in a messy parting of ways](#) that involved changed locks and accusations of secret meetings. The Cryers also let several office personnel go in an effort to control costs and redirect funds to animal care and feed. The new management released a desperate press release May 2, asking for contributions to help maintain animal care. Ironically, the press release sounded awfully similar to one Garcia wanted to release in early April, but was cautioned against releasing by then board member Sumner Matthes for fear of bad publicity. Unfortunately, the saddest, and most recent, story concerning WAO is the death of Bubba. We visited the exotic animal back in early May, and to our untrained eyes, the poor thing looked desperately thin and seemingly in pain with every step. Jamie Cryer told us Bubba arrived to WAO in compromised health, possibly due to poor diet and care under early owners of the tiger. After two veterinarians independently recommended euthanizing Bubba, he was put down last Friday. Though the final culprit was suspected to be lymphoma, the Wild Animal Orphanage had a necropsy performed and the results are pending.

This comes on the heels of more personnel shake-ups within the organization. In mid-May longtime board member Matthes, and his wife Elise, who joined the board to fill Garcia's slot, left their positions. Three new members, including Suzanne Straw, a member of SeaWorld's Zoological team, joined and the web site lists one position still open. Samuel Sherwood, a "management specialist," as community relations director Robert Mitchell calls him, came in several weeks ago and left last week. Mitchell, who was recruited by Sherwood, said only "[Sherwood's] focus was to get things back in order and set up a management system to get everything under control. We're still doing that, just without him." Mitchell, a part-time employee with military public relations training (from 30 years ago) said he would stay because "I don't want to leave these people in a lurch." Currently, there is no full time veterinarian on staff. Animal medical care beyond what can be provided by the five animal care technicians can do is provided by two volunteer vets, according to Mitchell.

We asked Mitchell if WAO had plans to replace Jamie Cryer, 39, as director, one of the more controversial staff members at WAO, though he is working without a salary. In early May, when we asked Cryer himself how long he planned to stay, he indicated his position is temporary. Mitchell said as of now, there are no plans to replace Cryer. Garcia and former board member Kristina Brunning frequently point out Jamie Cryer's past criminal record (several non-violent misdemeanors from 1991-92, when Cryer was between 21 and 22 years old), temper, and his more recent \$3,500 fine levied by the Department of Transportation last fall, when Cryer worked as an animal transporter for WAO, which the Orphanage must pay off in full by July 3. Then there are some [semi-coherent concerns](#) that Wild Animal Orphanage refused to return animal transport cages after receiving two tigers in them. We're more concerned with yet another husband-and-wife team assuming operational responsibility after the Asvestas did such a disastrous job previously.

Despite all the hustle and bustle in the people department, things in the financial department still appear stagnant. Mitchell told us that donations were at the same level they were just after Cryer stepped in as director and that the Orphanage is "still in the hole," though he did not have exact data. Tour scheduling, a primary source of income, has been reduced by two hours per day, and we're told the Orphanage was not open for at least Sunday and Monday of Memorial Day weekend. To help prop up the organization during what Mitchell calls "a little bit of turbulence," Mitchell is helping to plan a benefit concert for July 11 at Floore's Country Store in Helotes, featuring the John Colvin Band, Wolfpak, Halfway Legal, Ashly Dixon, Dan Searcy & Cedar Fever and the Jimmy Cribb Band, plus a silent auction. In the meantime, we'll be very interested to see the results of the next USDA inspection, expected to be performed this week or early next week, to get a better sense of how the Orphanage is being run on the level where it really matters, the animals.

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