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DEADLY SANCTUARY A CHRONICLE INVESTIGATION

‘Death row’ for dogs



Photos by Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Exhumed animals lie on a field as investigators perform necropsies as part of a June search warrant at Miranda's Rescue in Fortuna (Humboldt County).

Miranda’s Rescue claimed to offer a safe haven for animals for years, but signs of killings were ignored until rescuers united to dig up proof

Editor's note: This story contains graphic images of dead animals and includes details of how they were killed.

FORTUNA, Humboldt County — In 2004, Jesse Armstrong was a high school freshman looking for a job. Two older buddies persuaded him to join them working at Miranda’s Rescue, a no-kill animal shelter. The job entailed feeding animals, cleaning dog kennels and exotic bird cages, and maintaining the large property by mowing and weeding it.

Armstrong, usually wearing blue jeans and a Carhartt shirt, would stop off before and after classes at Ferndale High, on weekends, and off and on during the summer, and follow the

By Matthias Gafni • STAFF WRITER



Miranda's Rescue founder Shannon Miranda speaks with an officer from Sacramento County Animal Care Services trying to reclaim a dog that had been sent to the sanctuary.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Miranda's Rescue received international attention after officials uncovered a mass dog grave at the "no-kill" sanctuary. A Chronicle investigation has found ominous signs were ignored for decades. This is the first in a series of stories.

instructions of owner Shannon Miranda.

One day during a wet winter, Armstrong recalled, Miranda asked the boys to use a tractor to dump something into the Eel River, which ran along a levee set against the edge of the 50-acre property. When Arm-

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Crackdown by ICE has moved on to airports

By Sara DiNatale and Ko Lyn Cheang
STAFF WRITERS

A newlywed on her way home after celebrating her marriage to her American husband with friends.

A professional athlete who'd previously been granted a visa for sportsmen with extraordinary abilities. A student about to start a master's degree. Three friends who planned a short trip to Southern California are now sitting in detention centers.

All of them were flying to or

ICE continues on A12

Fans line up early to win free fried chicken as Jollibee opens

By Mario Cortez and Irene Adeline Milanez
STAFF WRITERS



Benjamin Fanjoy/For the S.F. Chronicle

Jollibee's mascot entertains a crowd of customers at the restaurant's opening Friday in downtown San Francisco.

As the sun set on downtown San Francisco on Thursday, Cristy Egamino and four family members set up camping chairs outside Jollibee on Market Street. It was more than 12 hours before the Filipino fast-food chain's highly anticipated opening the following morning, to ensure that they would be first in line. As stalwart Jollibee fans who regularly drive to the Daly City location for fried chicken and spaghetti, they took turns sleeping to safeguard their spot.

By Friday morning, a snaking line of fans formed behind them.

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Alexandra Hootnick/For the S.F. Chronicle

Jesse Armstrong said Shannon Miranda asked him twice to dump dead dogs into the Eel River while Armstrong worked at Miranda's Rescue as a high school student.

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strong got to the machine, he said, he saw the bodies of half a dozen dogs in the tractor's bucket, in various states of decomposition.

"I was like, 'Oh s—!'" Armstrong said. He said he recognized a friendly husky mix he had given water and fed just two days earlier. "These were dogs that just couldn't find a home."

With Miranda watching, they drove the tractor to the river and dumped the bucket. The dogs disappeared.

A couple months later, he said, early before school, Miranda told the boys there was "something to take care of" in the barn. They went in and found a tarp hanging over the tractor's bucket. A half-dozen dogs lay inside. Most appeared to be large and pit bull mixes, but Armstrong spotted a tiny Yorkshire terrier. He pulled the tarp back down, and the boys quit on the spot.

"My grandparents had a Yorkie, and that did it for me," he said. "I'm not doing this s—."

Now, more than two decades later, the fate of dogs at



Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Miranda told investigators that he shot as many as 10 sick or "unadoptable" dogs a month in this barn as a form of humane euthanasia, according to a court order authorizing a search.

Miranda's Rescue is receiving international media attention after the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, the FBI and other federal agencies — acting on information from animal activists — procured a search warrant and excavated a dirt field at the facility in June, uncovering a canine mass grave.

The rescue billed itself on its website as a "no-kill rescue, adoption & sanctuary facility that brings relief to hundreds of distressed, neglected, abused & discarded animals, large & small, every year." For a fee of usually \$500 per dog, Miranda's offered public shelters a safe home for truckloads of dogs they

were unable to place with local families.

But a Chronicle investigation found that Miranda may have spent years improperly killing dogs, as well as some cats, not only on his property, but also by taking them to veterinary clinics to be euthanized because they were allegedly sick or aggressive. This

occurred while glaring warnings went unheeded for decades by law enforcement, county officials and the shelter community. The Chronicle reviewed court documents, public records and decades of complaints about the facility and interviewed dozens of former employees, associates, local veterinary staff and animal rights advocates.

One public shelter in Oakland calculated that it sent 827 dogs to Miranda's since 2020, while paying the nonprofit \$376,000. Investigators said in a search warrant affidavit that when they combed through the sanctuary's paperwork, they found only a single adoption record.

Armstrong said he called the sheriff's tip line a few years after quitting and reported what he had been asked to do, but did not get a response until the sheriff's office contacted and questioned him six months ago.

Armstrong wasn't alone in his concerns about the facility. A former employee at a nearby veterinary clinic said Miranda brought in dogs for euthanasia that he claimed were aggressive, though many showed no signs of aggression. One was "just so sweet," she said. A former re-



Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Jenna Moore pats Checo, a dog rescued by Jennifer Raymond, outside Raymond's home next to Miranda's Rescue in Fortuna (Humboldt County).



Photos by Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Dogs are housed in June at Miranda's Rescue, which calls itself a "no-kill" sanctuary but faces accusations of animal cruelty.

ceptionist there said she watched as cats from Miranda's rescue center, filling an entire horse trailer, were brought to her clinic and put down.

Investigators allege Miranda, 55, killed the animals as part of a plan to collect hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees from the shelters and pet owners who left animals in his care, believing they would be well-treated and perhaps adopted.

The Chronicle found that at least three public shelters, including San Francisco Animal Care and Control, stopped sending animals there as concerns about Miranda swirled.

Public records indicate that the rescue took in more than 2,700 dogs since 2020 from 21 public shelters, most in Northern California. Those numbers do not include animals from private owners and other nonprofit dog rescues in California and beyond.

Miranda, who did not respond to texts, emails and letters, as well as shouted questions from a Chronicle reporter outside his Fortuna rescue, has not been arrested or charged with a crime. A legal expert said California law gives owners broad powers to euthanize their animals.

The only legal action taken thus far against Miranda is a lawsuit by Rocket Dog Rescue, a popular Oakland facility, alleging he committed animal cruelty and fraud in killing three dogs transferred to his care. The suit was filed in Humboldt County Superior Court last Monday.

Miranda told investigators that he shot as many as 10 sick or "unadoptable" dogs a month as a form of humane euthanasia, because they had severe behavioral issues, according to a court order authorizing an end-to-end search of his land.

In interviews with law enforcement and a local reporter, Miranda said he would walk dogs to a red barn at the rear of his property, give them wet canned food in a bowl and, while they ate, shoot them between the eyes with a .22-caliber rifle. Investigators found blood spatter, spent bullet casings and more than 600 dog collars in the barn, some with tags engraved with the dogs' names.

Armstrong said Miranda would ask the boys to spread a pallet of powdered limestone across a field behind "a red barn." He didn't understand at the time that limestone, or calcium carbonate, can be used to hide the smell of decomposing animals.

Miranda was making "a very bare minimum \$250,000 a year" by taking in dogs "and killing them to allow him to keep the dogs coming in and the cash flowing," Humboldt County sheriff's Sgt. Shane Steele wrote in a second search warrant affidavit in June.

The dogs kept coming in part because Miranda boasted of extraordinarily high placement success, sharing stories of gleeful adoptions of



Shannon Miranda, founder and president of Miranda's Rescue, lives on the same property as his 50-acre animal rescue, which generally charges \$500 to take in a dog needing sanctuary.

the pets via texts to shelters and individuals who sent animals to him. He acknowledged to investigators that some of those adoption texts were sent out after he'd killed the dogs, court records show.

Steele said in his affidavit that Miranda's Rescue probably adopted out about 100 dogs a year, a fraction of what it took in. That estimate did not surprise two animal rights activists who for decades accused Miranda of killing dogs and relentlessly pursued evidence about the facility and say they have been vindicated by the findings.

Jennifer Raymond, 75, and Jenna Moore, 46, uncovered what they say is irrefutable proof that Miranda was killing dogs en masse. Raymond bought the parcel next door to Miranda to spy on his property — and eventually infiltrate it — to obtain the evidence she later delivered to police, prompting the current investigation.

'Animals above all'
The sheriff's probe must sort out whether deputies can prove that a man, whose shelter was once so well regarded that it won awards and people bequeathed him their homes, profited by killing animals.

Born in 1970, Miranda grew up in Ferndale, a tiny town just north of the Avenue of the Giants, home to Victorian mansions built when it was known as "Cream City" because of its wealthy dairy farmers. In high school, he trained mustangs. His family hunted, but Miranda was more drawn to saving animals.

As a young man, in 1993, he was convicted of embezzlement. Though the details of the misdemeanor case are unclear — it has since been expunged from his record — investigators cited it in a recent search warrant affidavit, saying it was part of a "pattern of Shannon's behavior in business."

Miranda married his high school sweetheart, and the couple had a son, living in a single-wide trailer and rescuing horses, cats, dogs, rabbits, possums and other animals in his backyard. He worked at a lumber mill and broke his neck and back in 1994, according to his rescue website.

Alice Millington, a feral cat rescue devotee, once brought a sick puppy to Miranda. She returned a day later and saw Miranda in a rocking chair on his porch, gently swaying, the puppy resting over his shoulder. The dog would die of par-

vo, Millington said, but she and Miranda became lifelong friends.

She said they shared a mantra: "Animals above all."

As space became limited, Miranda moved to a dairy farm, where in 1998 he incorporated as Miranda's Rescue, a no-kill rescue and adoption sanctuary.

That same year, California passed the Hayden Act, which ordered shelters to prioritize adoption over euthanasia, requiring a holding period of at least four business days for newly arrived animals, euthanasia limitations, mandatory vet care and the use of nonprofit rescues as alternatives to animals being put down.

It created a need for rescues open to taking larger dogs, which are less likely to be adopted than smaller ones, and an opportunity for Miranda.

"It initiated the era of no-kill and pressured shelters to become no-kill, which popularized the practice of transfers," Raymond said of the legislation.

Millington continued sending animals to her "little brother." One year, she attended a contest in which participants tried to scoop up slippery piglets. Afterward,

one piglet covered in grease and sores from the hot day was auctioned off. When the auctioneer twisted the piglet's ear to make it squeal, Millington was so horrified that she paid \$1,000 for it.

She wound up taking the piglet to Miranda, who kept it for a number of years. However, one day, she visited his barn and Miranda shoed Millington away. They were slaughtering her pig.

"I knew that was the future of the pig," she recalled. "I just didn't want to be there."

In late 2001, the rescue found its permanent home in Fortuna, slowly occupying four parcels sandwiched between the banks of the Eel River and Highway 101. An animal lover sold the main parcel to Miranda and his wife for \$70,000 in 2003.

That year, the town of Ferndale agreed to pay Miranda \$450 a month to take its stray animals. It's unclear how many animals were covered by the fee. He would enter similar agreements with Fortuna and Rio Dell, and animals would soon arrive from all over the state.

Those arriving animals that were larger, Armstrong contends, were more likely to be branded as having behavioral issues and euthanized just a few years later.

"I know there (was a) separate kennel in back the public can't see and they are the mostly bigger breeds," he said. "We called that death row (because) we knew he was gonna kill them. ... They cost more to feed. He always told people those were the aggressive dogs. But they weren't aggressive. They just ate more, cost more to keep."

In July 2005, Miranda's wife, Kim, filed for divorce, citing "irreconcilable differences" in court records. In divorce papers, Shannon Miranda said he had a monthly income of \$839 to support a family with three kids. Soon after, Millington received a call from Miranda. "I'm gay," he said to open the conversation. She and others had known that Miranda had started dating a man who worked at the rescue.

In 2007, the rescue was named "Best Sanctuary for Abused Animals" by the California Assembly and the Red Cross named Miranda one of "Humboldt County's Heroes." That year, the nonprofit claimed it rescued 866 animals and adopted out 577.

Raymond, living in Ferndale, had heard dark rumors about Miranda harming animals after having her own dispute with him about a cat she left with him. She noticed new trucks and a horse trailer outside a remodeled house. Most rescues operate on a shoestring budget, so the expensive toys drew attention and suspicion.

"What I was seeing was not the face of what a rescue should look like," she said. "It looked like he was getting an awful lot of money going to himself."

In a 2007 "Friends of Miranda's Rescue" newsletter, Miranda updated readers on plans for a \$150,000 "Canine Castle," a 170-by-40-foot "doggie dream house" to protect them from "Humboldt's often brutal weather." A year into fundraising, the newsletter reported \$50,000 had been raised.

Yet no indoor facility was ever built. The dogs remained exposed to the harsh North Coast winters in kennels surrounded by chain-link fences and corrugated metal roofs.

Debt and disputes

Amid the fundraising successes, Miranda appeared to be struggling to pay his bills.

He received liens for delinquent state, federal and county taxes 19 separate times after 2009. He accumulated more than \$81,000 in federal tax liens, but paid them off over the years. However, he still owes about \$20,000 of his almost \$47,000 in state tax liens, records show.

In July 2012, Miranda landed back in criminal court after he allegedly got into a fistfight. Prosecutors dropped a misdemeanor charge, and scant details remain in the

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Jenna Moore, left, hugs Marianna Mullins at a protest against Miranda's outside Humboldt County Superior Court in Eureka in June. Moore helped dig up dogs at the property.

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criminal file.

By 2014, Miranda had begun to face very public criticism of his rescue operation. Marianna Mullins, a Sacramento woman, set up a Facebook page called “Miranda’s Rescue Fortuna, CA — The Truth Behind The Lies.” She accused Miranda of improperly killing pit bulls he promised to rescue for a fee.

Mullins hired a private detective who investigated the sanctuary, and she aired the findings over social media and to anyone who would listen. At one point, the detective told a Humboldt County sheriff’s deputy investigating a break-in at the shelter that he “believes Shannon has the dogs euthanized and then buried.” But nothing happened. The deputy suggested to Miranda that he “consider a restraining order against Mullins,” according to her report.

A Humboldt County news site, the Lost Coast Outpost, called Mullins’ work a “smear campaign.”

But questions about Miranda’s were spreading. The Chronicle found that at least three public shelters grew concerned enough about Miranda’s Rescue over the years to cease sending its animals there.

In May 2017, San Francisco Animal Care and Control sent a dog named Sasha to the sanctuary — and then never turned over another. The shelter formalized a blacklisting of Miranda’s in an internal memo: “Regional professionals have welfare concerns with regards to this sanctuary.”

A spokesperson for the San Francisco agency, Deb Campbell, said Miranda’s mandatory per-animal fee was among a number of issues that prompted the move.

“There was scuttlebutt in the professional shelter community that raised red flags,” she said. “We’re very cautious about where we send our animals. ... We’re just so relieved and grateful that we didn’t send more there.”

Miranda married James Oxborrow, a former adult film star, in June 2019 in Las Vegas, records show. They shared happy photos on social media, posing in colorful suits and sunglasses outside the Bellagio Resort’s iconic fountains. Both entered bodybuilding competitions, often posing for photos while exercising or in front of their gym.

Oxborrow, who did not return calls and texts from a reporter, sold nutritional supplements. Like Miranda, he had financial difficulties.

He declared bankruptcy in Hawaii in 2001, and debt collectors sued him for about \$25,000 in 2021, according to federal and Clark County, Nev., court records.

In 2021, Kyle Dunlop, an animal care supervisor for Marin Humane in Novato, first heard concerns about Miranda’s.

Dunlop started a statewide email listserv, an electronic network of animal shelters, to share information about California’s largely unregulated rescues.

She wrote in personal notes obtained by the Chronicle that Miranda’s used shock collars to curb dog reactivity and exposed them to the cold in outdoor kennels. She mentioned “alarming videos” and noted that other rescues had stressed how money motivated Miranda. Based on her notes, Marin, too, refused to send dogs there.

In December 2021, Contra Costa County Animal Services transferred dogs from its Martinez facility to the rescue before Miranda “repeatedly struck” a dog named Petey, according to an internal email obtained by the Chronicle.

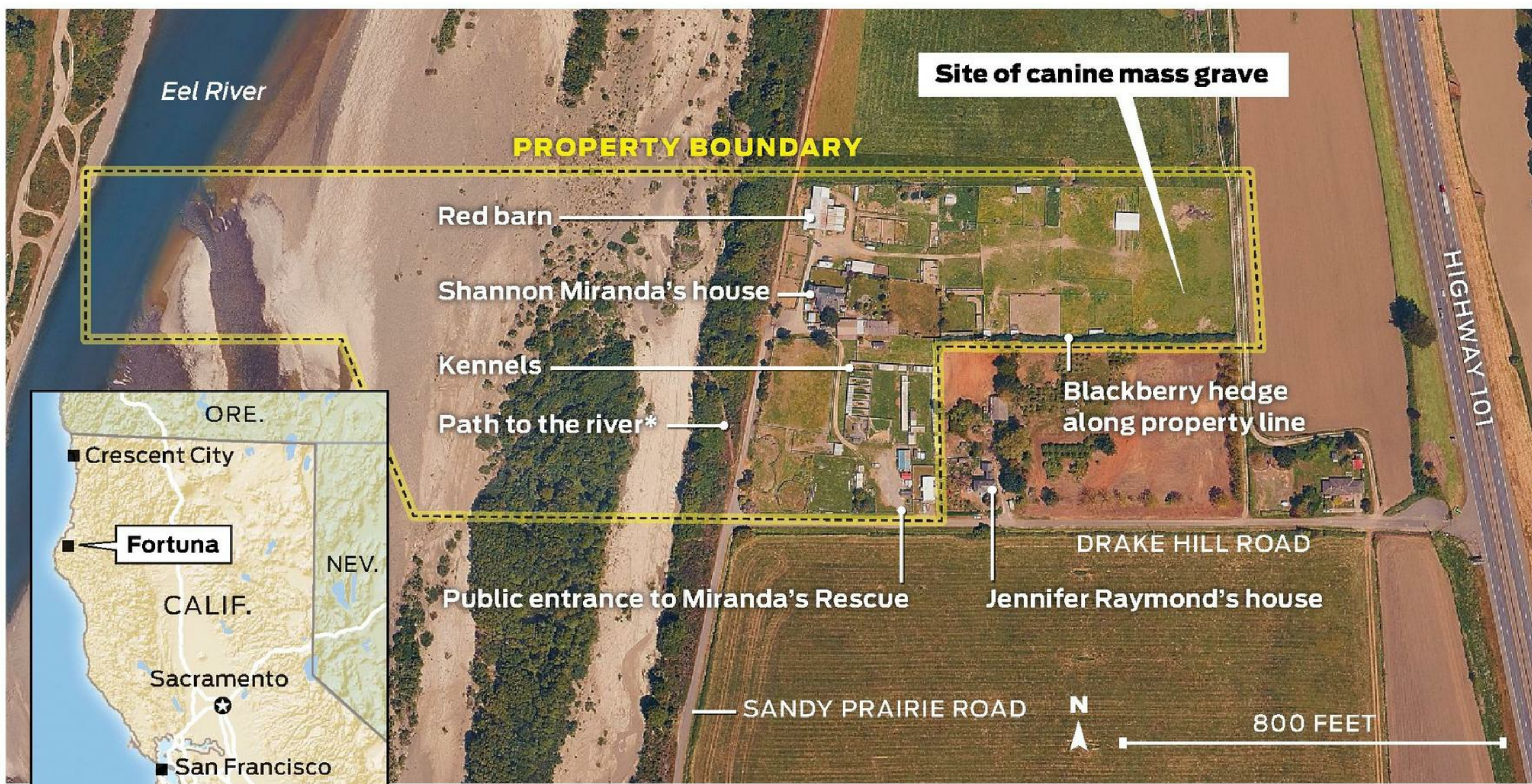
“The report described that the dog was not aggressive but extremely energetic and that you ‘punched’ the dog three times on top of his head before the dog stopped jumping,” Beth Ward, the county agency’s executive director, wrote in a letter to Miranda. “We consider this type of physical aggression toward a



Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Protesters rally against Miranda’s Rescue outside Humboldt County Superior Court in Eureka in June, the month investigators with a search warrant unearthed 117 intact dog remains on the property, plus skulls, microchips and collars.

Miranda’s Rescue property



* Water levels in the Eel River are highly variable and seasonally inundate the dry riverbed shown in this satellite image.

Sources: OpenStreetMap contributors, Google Earth, Chronicle reporting

Todd Trumbull/S.F. Chronicle

dog unacceptable.”

Ward cited “information we have received from other agencies with similar concerns” in her letter and said she would “hesitate” to send any future transfers without a phone call to discuss what happened with Petey.

Days later, Ward appeared to reverse course. She referenced a phone conversation with Miranda in a follow-up email and appeared to indicate Contra Costa County would change its protocols to give Miranda a better understanding of the dogs being transferred.

“Hopefully this will allow you to ensure you are familiar with the dog’s history and we are clear that you have received the information and approve of the transfer,” Ward wrote.

Two weeks later, records indicate, the county began sending dogs again. It would transfer 81 more dogs from 2022 until last year.

Ward, who stepped down from the East Bay post in 2024, could not be reached for comment.

Despite rising concerns, the charismatic Miranda maintained a contingent of diehard supporters, convinced he was an animal savior. In June 2023, a Humboldt County widower, Jurgen Giesel, gifted Miranda’s Rescue two parcels of land in Ferndale.

Reached by phone, Giesel said he had many years ago adopted a dog from Miranda and afterward became friends with him. The 89-year-old said he left no conditions on what Miranda could do with the land — allowing Miranda to immediately flip the property and sell it for \$350,000 on Nov. 3, 2023. Despite the recent headlines, Giesel does not regret his choice.

“I’m trusting my personal impression through all the other noise out there,” he said, adding that sometimes dogs need to be put down.

On Jan. 25, 2024, the California Franchise Tax Board revoked the nonprofit’s tax-exempt status for undisclosed reasons, records show. The next month, Miranda and Oxborrow bought a 5,000-square-foot, six-bedroom house in Las Vegas for just over \$1 million.

Miranda’s Rescue’s tax returns do not include a line item for fees received from the arrival of surrendered or

transferred animals. According to text messages obtained by the Chronicle, Miranda asked that transfer fees be paid to his personal Venmo account.

Robert Yetman, a UC Davis accounting professor emeritus who has extensive experience with the tax returns of nonprofit organizations, reviewed the last five publicly available returns for Miranda’s Rescue, per the Chronicle’s request.

“This stinks from the ground up,” he said.

Yetman, who has reviewed more than 100,000 Form 990 returns, said he would be concerned over potential “self-dealing” with Miranda’s, where directors extract money from the organization for personal use.

For instance, in 2023, public records indicate the rescue accepted 523 dogs from public shelters. With a minimum \$500 fee per dog, the nonprofit would have taken in more than \$250,000.

“There’s no line item I can see,” Yetman said of those fees. “If this is accurate about transfers, the revenue is clearly underreported on the 990s, it’s simply not there. ... It begs the question: Where’s

the money?”

The nonprofit’s tax forms for 2024 — completed by Brian Paris, Miranda’s treasurer and the brother of his former boyfriend — show that it paid salaries to Miranda (\$98,000), Paris (\$106,000) and Paris’ son (\$67,000). However, the previous year, Miranda’s reported no salaries for the officers on one page, but later on the same return listed salaries for its officers as \$75,000.

“The 990s, over time, are seen to be internally inconsistent, which is a red flag,” Yetman said.

These forms, which are public under federal law, indicate the facility took in \$11.5 million in revenue from 2015 to 2024. Miranda’s reported that a large percentage of its revenue came from four thrift shops it operates.

In 2024, in the latest tax return available, Miranda’s Rescue reported that the stores made \$1.07 million and spent \$927,000 acquiring the goods, making the net revenue only \$143,000. Raymond questioned why a thrift store that sells donated items would have any costs for goods.

Yetman said Miranda’s could include its paid wages as a “cost of goods.” But the



Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Jennifer Raymond, shown with Sparky, set up remote cameras on her property adjacent to Miranda’s Rescue to record evidence of dog kills at the shelter.



Courtesy of Jenna Moore

The bodies of this dog and seven others were found by Raymond and Jenna Moore, who cut through a fence on Miranda’s property in April.



Stephen Lam/S.F. Chronicle

Investigators exhum the remains of dogs in June while executing a second search warrant at Miranda's Rescue as part of an inquiry into reports of animal cruelty.

cost of goods figures reported on the forms show the thrift shops are basically “a wash.” They take in as much money as they cost to operate, “which doesn’t make sense,” he said.

In its 2024 return, Miranda’s claims it operated at a loss of \$200,000.

“If anyone was going to extract money from a charity in a nefarious way, you don’t want the nonprofit to show a lot of profits at the end of the year or else you have to show the money in the bank,” Yetman said.

‘Dogs are literally going missing’

In recent years, Humboldt County sheriff’s deputies received urgent complaints about the shelter, records show.

“Miranda’s Rescue is fraudulently euthanizing animals,” the director of Noah’s Ark Animal Haven and Rescue in Lakehead (Shasta County) alleged in May 2024, according to a heavily redacted report released by the sheriff’s office. “They are receiving a \$500 surrender fee and just putting the animals down under false pretenses.”

The director, Cassandra Odom, described on her Facebook page how she sent three dogs with full medical evaluations to Miranda, who still insisted on \$500 per dog – and within two months could provide no records of the dogs’ whereabouts.

“They were three dogs rescued from euthanasia and I thought I was giving them another way out, now I’m not even sure if they are alive,” she wrote. “Dogs are literally going missing from there, just up and vanishing without a trace. I do believe he’s euthanizing animals and not being transparent with the public about it. He will literally take any dog if someone has the \$500 surrender fee.”

The post brought Odom a stream of hate mail and nasty Facebook comments defending Miranda, as well as vitriolic texts and a voicemail from Miranda himself. Undaunted, Odom sent all her documentation to sheriff’s deputies, telling them she’d heard Miranda shot dogs and buried them on his property. She said she did not hear back from deputies until this year.

In September 2024, Yogi’s House, a Southern California rescue, transferred three dogs to Miranda’s Rescue, paying \$3,000. Tyson, Pepper and Potato would all wind up dead, according to documents obtained by the Chronicle.

“HOW CAN 3 DOGS THAT HAVE BEEN WITH US FOR YEARS ALL DIE WITHIN JUST A COUPLE MONTHS AT SHANNON



Alexandra Hootnick/For the S.F. Chronicle

An investigator studies animal bones dug up by crews at Miranda's Rescue, which bills itself as a “no-kill” facility but faces allegations that it improperly killed dogs entrusted to its care.



Alexandra Hootnick/For the S.F. Chronicle

Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsal discusses the investigation into Miranda's Rescue in June alongside Lt. Brandon Head, manager of the major crimes division.

MIRANDA’S RESCUE?” the group wrote in a PowerPoint it prepared for its lawyer.

Last October, Nirav Dave, a dog lover, was introduced to Miranda’s Rescue and paid \$4,000 to ensure that some dogs in need of transfer at the Contra Costa County shelter were sent to Fortuna, including Elton John, Barry Manilow, Barney, Timmy T and Keith Richards. His understanding was that the dogs would be adopted out or spend the rest of their lives at the sanctuary.

Dave paid an additional \$1,800 in cash after Miranda told him one dog was pregnant. Days later, he helped send two more dogs along with a \$2,000 cashier’s check. By the end of the month, Dave said, he wired \$15,000 of his own money to Miranda, who promised to build new concrete kennels reserved for his

dogs because he claimed one had chewed through a fence and killed another dog.

The kennels were never built, the Mountain View resident said. His attorney alerted the Humboldt County Sheriff’s Office, Dave said, but he was never contacted. He said he fears most of the dogs have been killed and buried.

Miranda gave similar explanations to others whose dogs had died at the rescue: The dog was too dangerous to let live, he’d say.

Tyson broke out of the fence and killed a neighbor’s two dogs in front of their children, he told Yogi’s House representatives.

Critics argue that even if Miranda is to be believed and that countless dogs have escaped to kill other dogs or cats, this would indicate he had no control over his rescue facility.

Stealth operation

For a couple of months at the end of 2024, Moore paid one of her employees to volunteer undercover at Miranda’s Rescue in an attempt to capture evidence. She had hoped to have him secretly wear a body camera to record the inner-rescue grounds, but he lasted only a couple of months before he quit after witnessing Miranda grab a dog by the collar and “smash its head into the ground for jumping on him,” Moore said.

Raymond, frustrated by the decades of inaction about Miranda’s, made her move after buying the property next door in February 2025. Peering over Miranda’s fence, she observed what she considered to be suspicious behavior. Along the fenceline, she and Moore set up camouflaged, motion-activated cameras often used by hunters.

The women soon caught Miranda dumping dead dogs into an open pit on his 50-acre property.

On April 26, the duo cut through a fence and snuck onto Miranda’s property, digging up eight freshly killed dogs. Six had microchips, and the data indicated they had only recently been transferred to Miranda’s Rescue. Days earlier, Miranda had told some of the shelters they had been adopted to families.

“After 25 years of rumors,” Raymond said, “I could finally prove this was happening.”

In June, backed by the findings of Raymond and Moore, investigators dug up part of the property and found 17 intact dog remains, 29 canine skulls, 91 microchips and 661 collars, said Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsal.

The investigators had called other shelters in the state and found staggeringly different kill numbers than Miranda’s, wrote Steele, the Humboldt County sergeant.

Pups Without Borders in Southern California, which has about half the capacity of Miranda’s, said it takes in about 500 dogs a year, a similar amount to Miranda, but has euthanized just one in its six years of operation. Sequoia Humane Society in nearby Eureka reported adopting out 197 dogs in just under a year, with no dogs being killed, according to its website.

From January 2025 to April 2026, Miranda’s Rescue received more than 900 dogs from shelters across the country, along with surrenders from private owners, which the sheriff estimated at almost 100 over a similar time period. Of those dogs, more than 700 remain unaccounted for after the dig, Honsal said.

Moore said that while she finds the criminal investigation to be frustratingly slow, she appreciates the current sheriff “checking the boxes.” She has much harsher words for past county officials.

“How would they have reacted if a parent was reporting their 3-year-old was making comments that their childcare provider was touching them?” Moore asked. “They would minimally go have conversations and check the place out. Why is it different? Because the animals can’t speak for themselves.”

At a news conference last month, Honsal explained the delay in investigating Miranda’s Rescue, saying rumors and speculation were not enough for his officers.

“We have to act on evidence,” he said. “We have to act on firsthand knowledge. Something witnessed.”

Attorney Bruce Wagman, **Miranda continues on A12**

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who has practiced animal law for more than three decades, said that in California pets are legally considered property and owners are allowed to humanely shoot their animals.

For Miranda's behavior to be criminal, he must display malice or cruelty, which is a high legal standard, Wagman said. Even killing a happy, well-behaved dog to create kennel space probably would not pass that threshold, he said. But, if prosecutors could get an insider to detail how and why animals were put down, that could create an animal cruelty avenue.

Even use of the term "no-kill" has no legal significance or definition whatsoever, Wagman said, and sets false expectations that are rarely met. He said prosecutors targeting a sanctuary like Miranda's might examine whether it

defrauded shelters whose contracts included strict euthanasia limits or individuals who sent it money with false promises. Or whether it paid taxes in compliance with non-profit rules and other applicable laws.

The Chronicle found one facility, the Solano County Animal Shelter, that reached a transfer agreement in 2022 that included a clause forbidding Miranda from putting down its animals without the recommendation of a veterinarian, and "for space or any other reason whatsoever." That shelter transferred 337 dogs to Miranda's Rescue since 2022, according to public records.

In its suit, Rocket Dog alleges Paddington, Paulie and Scooby were transferred to Miranda's on March 1 and all three dogs were found during the excavation by investigators even though Miranda had previously told the Oakland facility the trio had been

adopted.

Rocket Dog said Miranda told the organization that he thought they had been adopted and someone else at his facility must have killed the trio.

"(Miranda) represented that dogs entrusted to his care would be trained and placed for adoption and that, if euthanasia ever became necessary" he would contact Rocket Dog and give them the option to retrieve the animals, the rescue said in court documents. Rocket Dog is seeking damages.

"We believe ... that they said they were something and they really weren't," Honsal told the Times-Standard, Eureka's newspaper. "They collected a lot of money from a lot of individuals, saying that dogs could live out on their sanctuary, on their farm, or they'd be adopted out. In reality, those dogs were not."

'I was just a kid'

Jesse Armstrong, now 37,

runs a 300-acre ranch 90 minutes east of Miranda's Rescue, overseeing horses, cows, sheep, goats and produce. He shook his head remembering Miranda's dumping requests: "He was, like, really careless and nonchalant about it."

"I was just a kid at the time," Armstrong said. "That's probably why he had us do it, because we were kids."

Two women who worked at a local veterinary office that Miranda used to euthanize animals he labeled as aggressive or sick said the animals were well behaved and healthy.

Jessica Sandford, a kennel attendant at Ferndale Veterinary from 2009 to 2010, and a former receptionist there, whom the Chronicle granted anonymity because she said she feared for her family's safety, said that many of the dogs, labeled as "cage aggressive," displayed no such behavior.

The former receptionist said she grew to doubt that the euthanized cats brought to the facility in a horse trailer had the respiratory problems that Miranda alleged.

Kristopher Flores, a veterinarian who now runs Ferndale Veterinary, renamed Humboldt Veterinary Group, said he did not know what happened before he arrived at his clinic, but the current practice rarely deals with rescues.

As for Armstrong, two decades later, when he sees a tractor, he still thinks about the dogs.

"There's no telling how many dogs, between now and then, he's dumped in the river, dumped behind his house or dumped somewhere," Armstrong said. "All the animal activists out there that have reported it, no one listened to, they just swept it under the rug really and ignored them."

Alexandra Hootnick contributed to this report.

ICE

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from San Francisco International Airport when they were detained by immigration agents, part of a new front in the Trump administration's mass deportation campaign. At least 11 Bay Area residents have been ensnared in the crackdown in the past three weeks, according to immigration attorneys, relatives and witnesses.

Bay Area politicians, immigration attorneys and civil rights activists are now warning immigrants with unresolved immigration issues to avoid traveling through airports if possible.

"Ask any immigration attorney, whether they've been practicing for five years or 40 years, the types of actions that we're seeing at airports across the countries is essentially unheard of," said Ghassan Shamieh, a San Francisco-based immigration attorney who represents the newlywed and professional athlete, who both declined to be interviewed.

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is now targeting foreign citizens with expired travel visas for detention, even when they have U.S. spouses, no criminal records, no removal order against them and have pending applications for legal immigration statuses — a group that federal immigration agents have not historically focused on detaining.

The Department of Homeland Security declined to provide the number of airport arrests it has performed over the last two weeks. An agency spokesperson said the Trump administration reversed a "horrendous Biden-era policy" and was now ensuring "aliens in our country illegally can no longer fly unless it is out of our country to self-deport." But even during the first Trump administration, ICE agents weren't targeting airport travelers with ongoing immigration cases.

Shamieh said that he believes there are two reasons for ICE stepping up airport arrests. First, it is "low-hanging fruit," he said, in the sense that when someone books a flight, they must share sensitive personal information that the Transportation Security Administration can share with ICE. Second, he said, given the backlash that ICE agents have faced after large-scale enforcement operations in cities like Minnesota, making arrests at airports, behind the closed doors of security lines, provides ICE agents with far less public exposure and scrutiny.

"The manner in which ICE has detained them is what we find problematic



Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle

Kaylah Williams May, left, and Elizabeth Ziese chant during a rally at San Francisco International Airport on May 1. Immigrants with unresolved immigration issues are being warned to avoid traveling through airports.

ic," Shamieh said. "That they've done this without a pre-deprivation hearing."

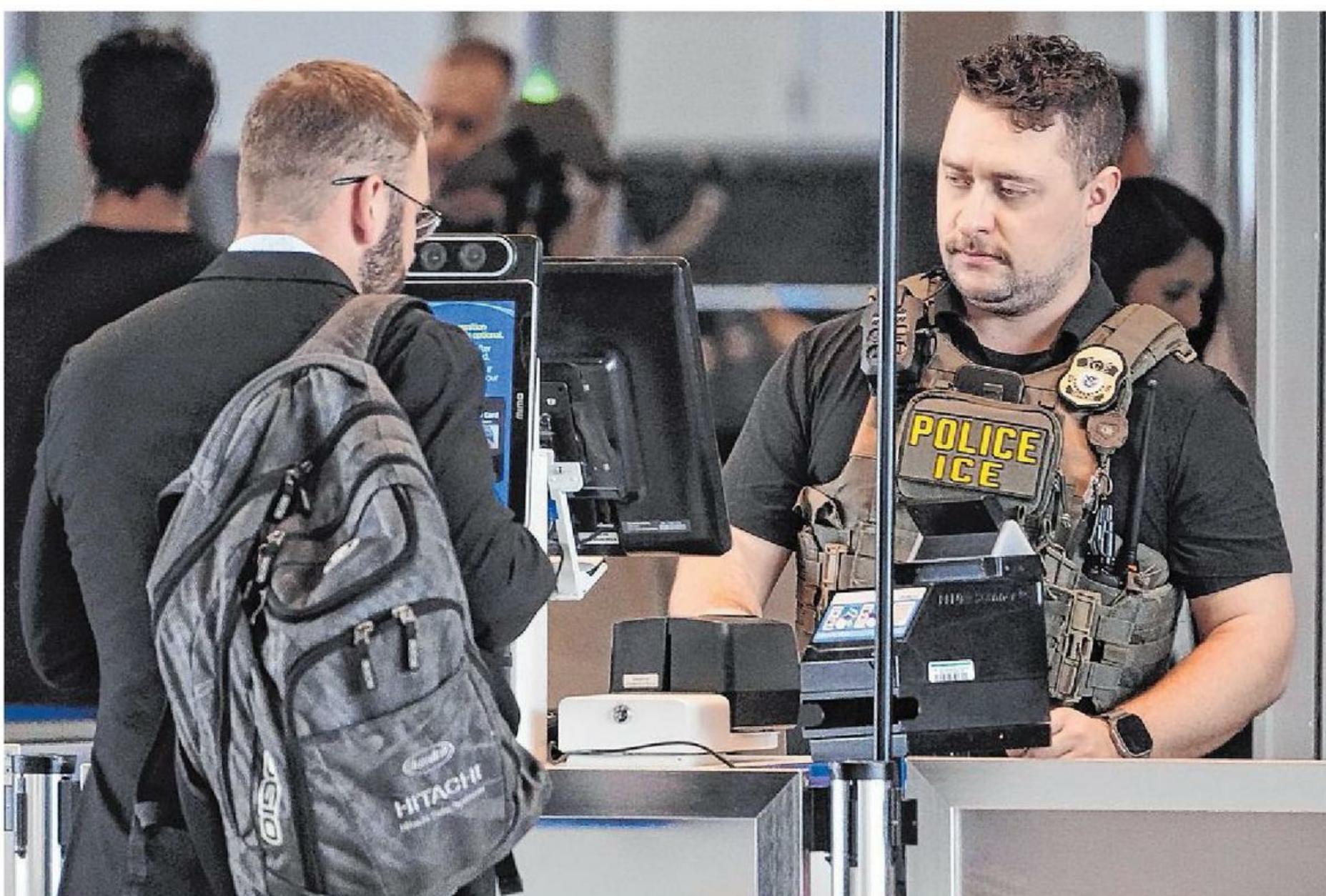
Five of his clients have been detained at airports in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Phoenix in the past two weeks. Four of those had pending asylum applications, which generally provides individuals temporary legal authorization to remain in the country and protection from deportation until a decision is made. The fifth had pending visa applications, he said. None had criminal records, he said.

"Because of this expansion, it's not safe for people with uncertain immigration status to fly right now, including for anyone currently in the process of changing their status," state Sen. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, said in a statement Wednesday. "People with uncertain immigration status may want to consult with an immigration attorney before deciding whether to fly."

Expired visas

The New York Times reported Tuesday that immigration agents in plain clothes have been picking up people with expired visas across 15 airports, including San Francisco. At least 27 arrests across nine states, including California, targeted those with expired visas, ABC News reported. Before the most recent detentions, ICE agents in airports mainly targeted those with judge-issued removal orders or administrative warrants.

On July 20, agents picked up one Oakland woman from Ecuador while she tried to board a flight in Denver. Another Oakland woman was waiting for a connecting flight in Phoenix when ICE agents detained her. A Richmond City Council member filmed a photog-



Gene J. Puskar/Associated Press file photo

ICE is targeting foreign citizens with expired visas, even those with U.S. spouses, pending immigration applications and no criminal record or removal order.

rapher and cafe worker, a woman from Ukraine, being detained by ICE at San Francisco Airport as she was returning from a trip to Portland, Ore.

Rep. Kevin Mullin, D-San Mateo, whose district includes SFO, told the Chronicle in a statement that he's "concerned about reports of ICE operations at Bay Area airports."

"Trump's chaotic ICE deployments across the U.S. have been incredibly unsafe for communities, including for citizens and non-citizens who are in this country legally," Mullin said in a statement. "Airports should not become an ICE enforcement zone to round people up."

San Francisco-based immigration attorney Kyra Lilien said her firm is advising clients to avoid air travel if they have an ongoing asylum case, pending green card application or any other non-permanent status that may be in transition or pending approval.

Lilien, a former immigration judge who lost her job under Trump, said ICE agents' recent actions are

worrisome for anyone with a nonpermanent status, including those who have valid work visas.

She is representing the three friends who flew out of SFO for vacation, only to be immediately met by ICE agents after landing in Los Angeles. The friends all came to the Bay Area on student visas and have since applied for asylum, she said. Another client, a green card applicant from Southern California, was planning to visit a Bay Area friend but was detained upon landing at SFO.

"These are people who are complying with the process, who have done everything asked of them," Lilien said. "They have no criminal histories, and they're not a threat to anybody."

ICE agents in March arrested a mother at SFO, but in that case the family had an outstanding removal order from 2019.

People with expired visas span a broad category that covers hundreds of thousands of people, including those married to U.S. citizens, skilled work-

ers and people with valid work permits issued by the federal government while awaiting green cards or visa extensions. They lack permanent legal status but, in most cases, are actively trying to obtain it.

Asylum seekers

Many of the recent airport arrests involved asylum seekers who were awaiting interviews with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, their attorneys said. The Trump administration earlier this week announced plans to bypass that interview process to cut down on backlogs and put pending cases before judges sooner. Lilien said ICE's airport crackdown dovetails with that policy shift because it's another way to "pluck" people from the process of applying for citizenship and, instead, drop them into courtrooms and detention centers.

The recent arrests suggest ICE is using flight passenger information to locate noncitizens for arrest, the American Civil Liberties Union is warn-

ing on its website. Attorneys with the San Francisco-based Asian Law Caucus also believe the Transportation Security Administration, which handles airport security, is sharing passenger information with ICE. TSA did not respond when asked whether the agency was sharing passenger information with immigration officials.

Abraham Sanchez, the husband of the Oakland woman detained in Phoenix, wrote in a GoFundMe plea seeking donations to help cover his wife's legal fees that an officer approached the couple with a photo of his wife, Mabel, on his phone.

"(He) asked her to confirm her name, and took her away," Sanchez said on the fundraising website. "She spent the first night detained near the airport, and the next day was taken to Eloy Detention Center."

Sanchez said his wife has a pending asylum claim and a work permit.

Chantal Rojas, the Oakland woman detained in Denver, entered the country legally in 2023 on a J-1, or exchange visa, as an au pair, her attorney Lauren Lichter said in a statement.

"She followed the rules of her program and, before it ended, timely filed an application with U.S. immigration authorities that allowed her to remain in the country while her case has been pending," Lichter said.

A woman detained at San Francisco International Airport last week, 38-year-old Iryna Gorb, had lived in the city for over a decade. Wiener said he is troubled that ICE wants to deport her back to war-torn Ukraine.

In a statement, the Department of Homeland Security called Gorb an "illegal alien" with an expired visa. The video of her detention, filmed by Richmond City Council Member Doria Robinson, spread quickly online last week.

In the recording, Gorb can be heard screaming for help. She's now being held at an ICE detention center in California City. One of Lilien's Bay Area clients is now at a detention center in Texas.

Immigration attorneys have been challenging many of the arrests, seeking to get their clients released from detention.

A judge ordered the release of Shamieh's professional athlete client on Wednesday.

A separate judge recently ruled that another one of Shamieh's clients could be released on \$35,000 bond, an "exorbitant" amount he said is almost unheard of. The Department of Homeland Security has 30 days to appeal, after which she may be released.