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**MARKHAM ANIMAL RESCUE & CONTROL 887-5012**



Markham Animal Control Officer Jim Ryan, shown here with two of his charges Clancy and Kerry, has been catching and caring for lost animals for the

past 25 years. Unlike some dog pounds, his keeps lost animals as long as possible and tries to find a good home for them. — Roberta Di Maio

## Animal control officer has gone to the dogs

By EDO VAN BELKOM

Jim Ryan's life's work has gone to the dogs — and cats and just about any other animal that has happened to come along.

The 66-year-old Markham Animal Control Officer has spent 25 of his 28 years in Canada giving shelter to unwanted animals finding good homes for strays and

"I hold the animals as long as I can and try to place them. But the difficulty with all the animal control is it's usually very badly underfunded," he said.

None of the animals in Mr. Ryan's Tara Kennels (on Stouffville Road west Kennedy) are given up for research purposes.

Even though the Town of Markham pays for just three days shelter for strays, the animals are kept as long as it takes to find proper homes for them. This sometimes can take months.

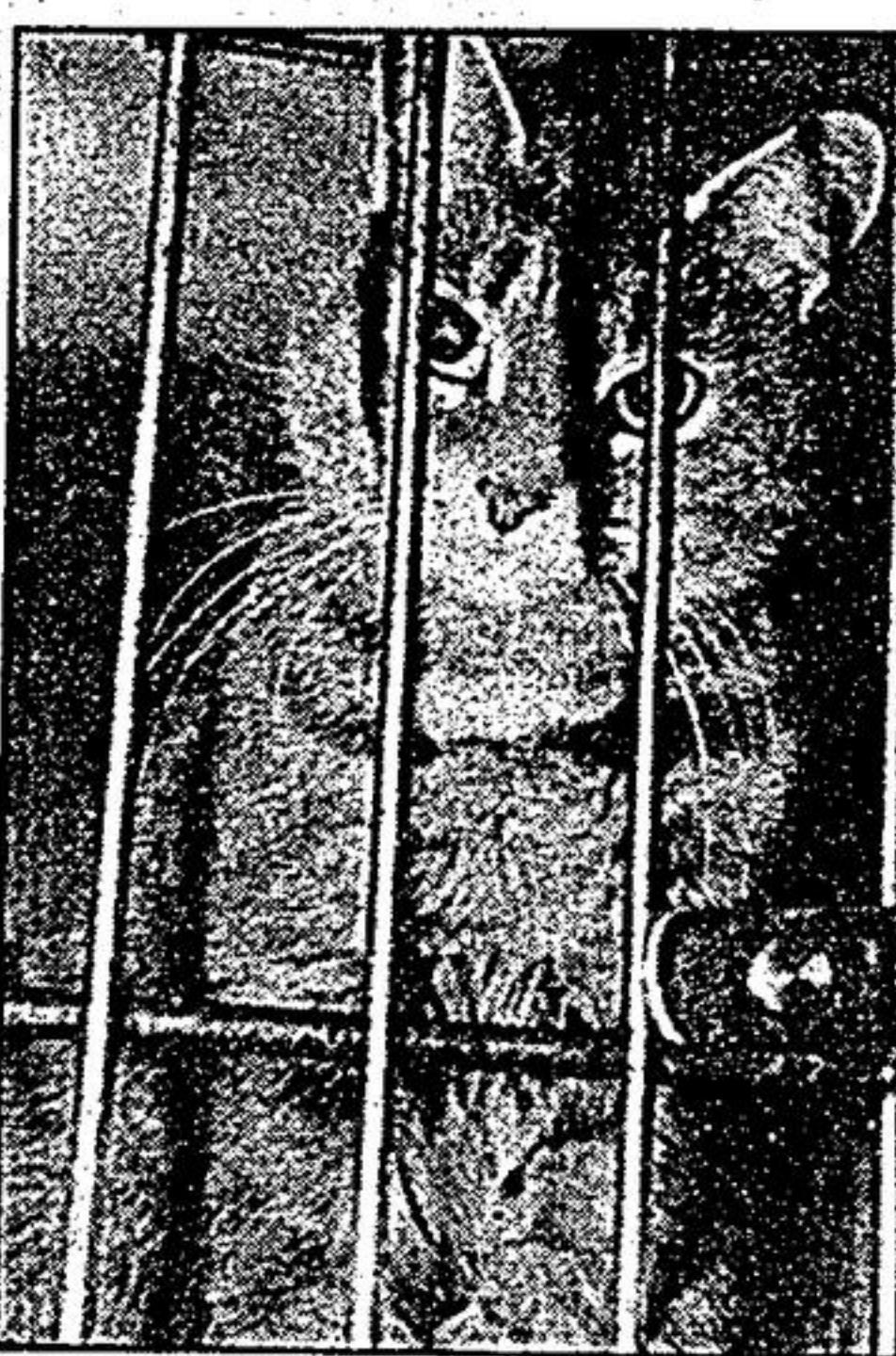
Mr. Ryan is vehemently opposed to animals being used for research into such things as chemical warfare, and makes the distinction between that kind of research and medical research.

"I don't want chemicals to be tested on an animal that will be used to kill my great grandson. But I accept the fact that animals are used for medical and veterinary research so that a human or animal life may be saved in the future."

The position of animal control officer may sound like a depressing one and in fact once you step into the shelter you're surrounded by animal cries and outreached paws that are searching for love and affection. Any compassionate mortal can't help but feel tiny tugs on the heartstrings.

But the job is not without its rewards. Mr. Ryan related a story that still brings joy to his face and fondness at the recollection of the incident.

He was called out one night to pick up a beagle hound that had



providing rabies isolation for animals suspected of having the disease.

As animal rescue expert he has picked up a variety of strays ranging from snakes and weasels all the way to a black bear he once tracked down in Richmond Hill.

Mr. Ryan says that the image of the animal control officer has changed dramatically since he first began in 1961. In those days a dog catcher was seen as a person to be feared by pet owners.

Mr. Ryan has taken every opportunity to speak to community groups and organizations about getting rid of the "dog catcher" mentality. He feels animal control officers should be seen as helping both animals and humans alike.

"It's always been my philosophy that if you're kind to an animal you're being kind to a human because someone somewhere loves that animal," said Mr. Ryan, whose warm Irish accent and caring tone of voice confirms his love of animals of all kinds.

Unfortunately, when talking of unwanted animals and strays, the subject of animals being used for research purposes always arises.

suffered a broken pelvis after being struck by a car. The dog was brought to the veterinarian and took a full five weeks before it showed signs of recovery.

Mr. Ryan wrote a weekly column for the Richmond Hill Liberal at the time and explained the plight of the dog. A couple of days after the article appeared an elderly couple, who had been out of the country and left the dog's care to a friend, came in looking for the beagle hound.

"As long as I live," said Mr. Ryan, "I'll never forget the reunion. That's the big payoff in this job. Unfortunately it doesn't happen often."

His dedication to the animals has been well documented and



has brought him some acclaim. He was once featured on the CBC documentary program Man Alive and had a cover story about him and his operation appear in the old Weekend Magazine.

At 66, one might think Mr. Ryan is thinking of slowing down or passing the job onto one of his two sons or one of his employees. But he's still full of life and hasn't lost any of his enthusiasm.

"I don't think about retiring," he said. "It would be the end of me. This work is such a big part of my life, it would leave an awful void if I were to stop."

"I enjoy helping people and the people working for me are dedicated people. They're certainly not clock workers," he said.

