

What's Been Sleeping In Your Bed?

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Author: George Rust

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Legal-Healthy & Public Safety

FROM:George Rust/561-644 4128 / ybstag@msn.com

Animal Rights

WHAT'S BEEN SLEEPING IN YOUR BED?

MIAMI, FL [February 23, 2009] -- While animal rights' activists tossed Ringling Bros.[Feld Entertainment] into a legal ring in Washington D.C federal court this month., another case is soon to pounce on Busch Entertainment Corp - - the theme-park subsidiary of InBev/Anheuser-Busch.

The Florida case, however, is more than a contest over cruel and inhumane treatment of animals "on display." It raises serious health issues for the travelling public.

According to filed court documents, Cuban-born Arlin Valdez-Castillo, a 40-something chambermaid at Boykin's Miami airport Hampton Inn was assigned to conduct her housekeeping duties in hotel rooms occupied with an unusual clientele: lemurs, spider monkeys, a tropical parrot, and a five-year-old, five-foot long alligator named Bob. Although the rooms smelled like a zoo, according to members of the hotel staff, Arlin did her duty ... retrieving feathers and fecal matter left by the untidy exotics. Arlin didn't know about zoonoses [the medical term for diseases spread from animals to humans] until she fell seriously ill, was hospitalized for two weeks with angry lesions spontaneously erupting all over her body.

That was 2004. Next month, after five years of reoccurring skin lesions, diagnosed by a prominent Miami immunologist to have been caused by exposure to the exotic animals, a federal judge will weigh the evidence between man and beast. Recently, a Miami neurologist, who will testify at the upcoming trial, opined that the initial zoonotic infection has spread to Arlin's nervous system, causing her severe pain

in some extremities which he diagnosed as RSD (Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy).

Unable to work, Arlin's cause of action for payment of her mounting medical bills -- now calculated to exceed \$450,000 with no end in sight -- and sufficient funds to sustain a modest lifestyle and provide for future care, has been stymied at every turn by Busch lawyers, who claim "it's her fault" that she had allergies.

Such outrage does not stop with Arlin. Conservation Ambassadors, formerly Wild on Wheels formerly Zoo-to-You, a California company which claims to promote animal conservation and provide an educational experience to curious townsfolk across America. It is no coincidence that Conservation Ambassadors appears to have a single client -- Busch -- to promote the corporation's revenue-producing theme parks, including Busch Gardens -- Tampa.

But does dragging helpless wild animals cross country, submitting them to the dark, frigid cargo-holds of Boeing's best for 5+ hours really teach respect for wildlife? Or does it smack of high-powered publicity stunts to lure visitors out of shopping malls into theme parks to pump up the corporate bottom line?

Tourists and truckers should inquire of roadside innkeepers: What was sleeping in my bed before booking their motel rooms. Unwary folks may be exposing themselves to serious infectious diseases. These animals of the wild may not leave the light on for the weary traveler, but deposit dangerous microscopic organisms on the welcome mat in their wake.
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Additional information/substantiation available at:
PACER (Public Access Court Electronic Records) www.pacer.gov
Southern District of Florida Case # 1:06-cv-20772-WPD

Previous coverage: as follows
Hotel Online (9/08)

Hotel Online
News for the Hospitality Executive

A Hampton Inn Miami-Airport West Housekeeping Attendant Claims Health

Woes After Cleaning Up for Two Lemurs, a Monkey and an Alligator
By Douglas Hanks, The Miami HeraldMcClatchy-Tribune Regional News
Sep. 24, 2008 - There's no doubt some guests at the Hampton Inn Miami Airport
West behaved like animals during their stay four years ago. They had an excuse,
though -- being lemurs, a spider monkey, an alligator and a parrot.

The menagerie -- stars of a traveling zoo exhibition -- lies at the heart of a lawsuit
by a maid who cleaned rooms rented by the animals' handlers for eight days in
February 2004. Arlin Valdez-Castillo blames chronic medical problems on exposure to
bird feces, monkey dander and other alleged hazards from the exotic guests.

The case, being heard in federal court in Miami, will force a judge to weigh the legal
protections for employees, employers and beasts when all three land in close
quarters.

Defense lawyers want Judge Shelby Highsmith to throw out the case partly based on
court precedents that animal owners face liability only if their charges attack (such
as a dog bite) rather than simply perform natural functions (such as spider monkey
droppings).

"Plaintiff's alleged allergic reaction was not due to the dangerous propensities of the
wild animals," attorneys for Busch Gardens, which hired the animals for a local
publicity tour, wrote in a motion. "Rather, the allergic reaction was due to Plaintiff's
own immune system."

The case also reveals some of the complications involved when business travel
includes the furry and the feathered.

ANIMAL

HOUSE

Lawyers submitted as evidence a Busch Gardens manual for traveling with animals.
Among the tips: Book a room near an ice machine when on the road with penguins
and always put the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door when leaving an animal alone
in a hotel room.

According to court documents, the messy dispute began in February 2004, when
Busch Gardens booked a South Florida publicity blitz for its safari theme park in
Tampa. It hired the traveling Wildlife on Wheels animal troupe run by Conservation
Ambassadors, a nonprofit in California's wine country.

On Feb. 9, Maya the spider monkey, Bob the alligator, Tango the Macaw and lemurs
Zuri and Rufio were loaded into containers and flown from California to Miami on an
American Airlines flight.

They joined Busch Gardens workers for performances at Miami Heat and Miami
Hurricanes basketball games, a Florida Panthers hockey game, and school and
television appearances.

At night the animals and their Wildlife on Wheels handlers slept at the Hampton Inn,
at 3620 NW 79th Ave. in West Miami-Dade.

But Valdez said she only cleaned the rooms as best she could, scooping up feathers by hand from the sink and scraping droppings off the carpet.

"I did what I had to do," she said Tuesday.

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Contact Details:

Plaintiff's counsel:

Michael M. Tobin, Esq.

Tel: 305-445-5475

John P. Hess, Esq.

Tel: 305-445-9525

Email: jphess55@hotmail.com

Bryan J. Yarnell, Esq.

561-622-1252 x178

bryanyarnell@gmail.com

Defendants' counsel:

Robert Blank, Esq. [Defendant Busch]

Tel: 813-223-4253

Email: rblank@rumbergerkirk.com

James E. Mitchell, Esq. [Defendant Conservation]

Alan L. Landsberg, Esq.

Tel: 954-761-8600

Email: jem@bunnellwoulfe.com

all@bunnellwoulfe.com