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LUIS ANDRES HENAO/AP

Rescued dogs flock to Ricardo Pimentel last week at his animal shelter.

Man opened home to 300 dogs as Hurricane Delta bore down

By **LUIS ANDRES HENAO**
 Associated Press

LEONA VICARIO, Mexico — As dangerous Hurricane Delta closed in on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula this month, Ricardo Pimentel opened his home — to about 300 dogs.

There were plenty of other critters too: Dozens of cats were harbored in his son's room; his daughter's room served as a refuge for chicks, bunnies and even a hedgehog; a patio became a haven for a flock of sheep.

Not surprisingly, the house smelled terrible, he says. But it was worth it: All survived the storm.

"It doesn't matter if the house is dirty, it can be cleaned," he said after the danger had passed. "The things they broke can be fixed or bought again, but what's beautiful is to see them happy, healthy and safe, without wounds and with the possibility of being adopted."

It all started with an Oct. 6 social media post. Pimentel told friends he had cut branches and boarded up windows at the Tierra de Animales (Land of Animals) shelter he founded nearly a decade ago about 20 miles southwest of Cancun, where he also lives with his

family. He warned of the hurricane's devastating power. Concerned that stores might remain shut after the storm, leading to food shortages, he asked for donations.

"If I lived with just 10 or 20 dogs, I wouldn't worry much, but here we have hundreds of animals and we can't afford the luxury of not having enough food," he said.

To keep the animals safe from the impending storm, he moved them inside. It took hours to lead the hundreds of canines indoors by leash.

A subsequent online post included photos of what looked like a carpet in his hallway. A closer look revealed that the carpet was alive — many, many dogs, crowded together. The post was shared widely on social media and grabbed headlines across the globe.

Pimentel was so busy during the storm — the hurricane downed trees, knocked out power and prompted the evacuation of thousands of residents and tourists along the Yucatan Peninsula's resort-studded coast — that he was unaware the post had gone viral.

Afterward, he was surprised by the generosity of

people from around the world who donated thousands of dollars. And local residents stepped forward to help clean up the damage at the shelter.

Pimentel has always preferred the company of animals. He dropped out of college and spent years fixing motorcycles and adopting stray dogs before fulfilling his childhood dream by starting the shelter in 2011. Today, some 500 animals live on nearly 10 acres of land.

Some Tierra de Animales dogs were rescued from dogfighting rings, or were unable to stand after being beaten. Over the years, many have been adopted by families in Mexico, Canada and the U.S.

Pimentel gets help from workers, volunteers and family, including 20-year-old daughter Luna, who is studying to become a veterinarian. Whenever he feels overwhelmed and needs inspiration to continue his mission, he looks at photos of rescue dogs who found a new home.

"We would like to think that thanks to all this attention, somebody would like to be part of the story and say: 'I adopted a dog saved from that famous Hurricane Delta.'"

RHONDA FLEMING 1923-2020

Actor of the '40s and '50s popular for her vivid hues

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Rhonda Fleming, the fiery redhead who appeared with Burt Lancaster, Kirk Douglas, Charlton Heston, Ronald Reagan and other film stars of the 1940s and 1950s, has died. She was 97.

Fleming's assistant Carla Sapon told The New York Times that Fleming died Wednesday in Santa Monica, California.

From her first film in color, "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" (1949) with Bing Crosby, Fleming became immensely popular with producers because of her vivid hues.

It was an attraction she would later regret.

"Suddenly my green eyes were green. My red hair was flaming red. My skin was porcelain white," Fleming remarked in a 1990 interview. "There was suddenly all this attention on how I looked rather than the roles I was playing."

"I'd been painted into a corner by the studios, who never wanted more from me than my looking good and waltzing through a parade of films like 'The Redhead and the Cowboy!'"

Before Reagan entered politics, the actor costarred with him in "Hong Kong," "Tropic Zone," "The Last Outpost" and "Tennessee's Partner."

In the big-studio era, many new personalities were publicized as having been discovered in quirky ways: Kim Novak while riding a bicycle past an agent's office, Lana Turner spotted in a malt shop.

In Fleming's case, young Marilyn Louis was reported to have been headed to class at Beverly Hills High School when a man followed her in a car and told her, "You ought to be in pictures." She eluded him, but he turned up at her



JIM PRINGLE/AP

Actor Rhonda Fleming at her Rome apartment in 1955. The star of Hollywood's Golden Age died Wednesday.

home and offered to be her agent.

At 19, Louis was awarded a six-month contract at the studio of David O. Selznick and a new name: Rhonda Fleming. She played a bit part in the 1944 wartime drama "Since You Went Away," and then Alfred Hitchcock chose her to appear in "Spellbound," starring Ingrid Bergman and Gregory Peck.

She won a role in "A Connecticut Yankee," a Crosby musical based on the Mark Twain story. Crosby was so impressed that he recommended her to Bob Hope, with whom she starred in "The Great Lover."

Ironically, the Crosby/Hope films that established her as a luminary proved to be ones she was never able to top. She remained a star for 15 years, but except for the Lancaster-Douglas "Gunfight at the OK Corral," most of her performances came in B-pictures that exploited her looks.

"I made the mistake of doing lesser films for good money," she reflected in a 1976 interview. "I was hot — they all wanted me — but I didn't have the guidance or background to judge for myself."

Among her 1950s films were "While the City Sleeps," directed by Fritz

Lang and co-starring Dana Andrews. She played Cleopatra in the 1953 film "Serpent of the Nile."

After her film career cooled off, Fleming took a singing act to Las Vegas, appeared in TV shows and commercials, starred on Broadway in a revival of "The Women" and sang as the temptress Lalume in "Kismet" for the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera.

She was born in Los Angeles in 1923. Her mother, Effie Graham, had appeared in a 1914 Broadway musical with Al Jolson, and her grandfather was a theatrical producer in Salt Lake City. She studied acting, but as a backup also took classes in shorthand, typing and book-keeping.

In 1977 Fleming married mogul Ted Mann, who built the Mann Theater chain, and the marriage lasted until his death in 2001.

After Fleming's sister, Beverly Engel, died of cancer in 1991, Fleming and her husband established the Rhonda Fleming Mann Resource Center for Women with Cancer at the UCLA Medical Center.

A couple of years after Mann died, Fleming married for a sixth time, to Derol Carlson, who died in 2017.

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