

Springing the Trap On Animal Activists

By Phil McCombs

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Washington — Kathleen Marquardt smiles and springs the trap. It closes on her hand with a vicious snap. It is a steel-jawed leghold trap for coyotes, thick and rusty and hanging from a chain — the kind of device that animal-rights activists say is painful and cruel. "See,"

But Marquardt is still smiling. "See," she says, "I'm not screaming. I'm not yelling. And this is for coyotes. Think about it. They're not small animals."

She is a large, jovial woman raised hunting and fishing and killing chickens for dinner in northwestern Montana, now living in Washington, the founder of an organization to combat the growing influence of animal-rights activists. Putting People First, says Marquardt, "represents the average American who drinks milk and eats meat, benefits from medical research, wears leather, wool and fur, hunts and fishes, owns a pet, and goes to zoos."

Marquardt, 47, has also run her own "think tank," attempted a gourmet food line and continues to custom-design clothing, wall hangings and rugs through her Elizabeth Quinn Couture. She was at home one afternoon a couple of years ago when "my younger daughter came home from school and told me that I was a murderer because I hunt. I found out that PETA [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals] had had a person in her classroom for three days, and I got furious. I'm telling my kids to learn, to listen to the teacher, but what do you do if you know somebody is there teaching them this perverted garbage?"

The first thing she did was go to her

er things, the power of organizations like PETA, whose national director, Ingrid Newkirk, has said that "6 million people died in concentration camps, but 6 billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses," and whose chairman, Alex Pacheco, told The New York Times, "We feel that animals have the same rights as a retarded human child."

The movement, Marquardt told Fortune, "is seeking to destroy a way of life. . . . They insist every form of life is equal: humans and dogs and slugs and cockroaches."

For their part, the animal activists consider PPF "a loose-knit band of loonies," says PETA's director of special projects, Dan Mathews, "anyone who takes any profit or even pleasure out of harming or killing animals." He thinks Marquardt and Wever are "Washington opportunists looking to rake in corporate dollars."

Each side accuses the other of harassment. Marquardt says she receives death threats regularly and turns them over to the FBI for investigation. Under her desk is a cardboard box into which she tosses notes from the opposition such as: "I hope you and your whole family die the most tragic and painful and slow deaths."

The desk is a mess, stacked high with talking papers and speaking invitations. Elsewhere in the office, half a dozen paid staff members — Marquardt receives no salary "yet" — are busy churning out press releases and fielding inquiries. But it's more than your normal lobbying situation, it's a battlefield, and Marquardt goes for any opening.

And what with Candice Bergen sporting a PETA coffee mug on "Murphy Brown



Larry Morris/The Washington Post