

## Sex offender's pet store closes

*by UPI*

PLANT CITY, Fla. - Many residents of Plant City, Fla., are celebrating the closing of a pet store owned by a convicted child molester. The Pet City Center store has been surrounded by controversy for the past three years, the Tampa (Fla.) Tribune reported Sunday. At first, residents were concerned about 37-year-old Gary Hicks, a man who served time in prison for inappropriate conduct with minors, owning a store full of pets that might lure children, the newspaper said. Then, he began facing accusations of animal cruelty after dogs were injured while in the care of his grooming business, and a new wave of protests surrounded his store, the report said. Finally, Hicks was forced to close the store because he was six weeks behind in rent and his landlord refused to renew his lease, the Tribune reported. Signs outside the store celebrated the closing, but Hicks will be opening a drive-through pet grooming business right next door to his old store. Florida lawmakers have proposed a law which would prevent sex offenders from operating pet stores. The state's current sex offender laws do not include pet stores on the list of prohibited workplaces.

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