

Town of Yucca Valley
Community Services Department
57090 Twentynine Palms Highway
Yucca Valley, California 92284
Tel. 369-7211 FAX 369-1605

NEWS RELEASE

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For Information Contact Jim Schooler, 760-369-7211

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Animal Control Staff Watching Out for Animals and People

Jim Schooler, Director of Community Services
Melanie Crider, Animal Care and Control Manager

For months, attempts have been made to elicit public sympathy and support for the owner of two dogs that attacked an 83-year-old woman who was out for a walk near the entrance to her mobile home park. It is important to understand that Yucca Valley Animal Control responded to the incident professionally and has provided excellent care for the dogs while the owner has drawn the case out.

On February 8th, 2012 Animal Control responded to an emergency call regarding the attack. Witnesses reported that both dogs came up behind the woman knocked her down on the street and bit her multiple times on her ankle and hips. The woman also sustained injuries on both forearms after being knocked over by the dogs.

Both dogs were impounded and quarantined at the animal shelter. Neighbors told the investigating officer that both dogs constantly ran loose, chased children and threatened other dogs in their own yards. Witnesses said that they feared retaliation by the dogs' owner and feared testifying at the hearing.

An Administrative Hearing was scheduled and after hearing the testimony from both sides, the Hearing Officer declared both dogs "potentially dangerous" and ordered the owner to license his dogs, register them as "potentially dangerous" dogs, micro-chip both dogs, provide a secure area from which the dogs could not escape, to keep the dogs on leashes when off their property, to obtain liability insurance and to reimburse the Town for the costs incurred. Compliance with these conditions would have resulted in the release of the dogs.

The Town negotiated a settlement with the dog owner and his attorney who then tried to place the dogs with family or a rescue, but no home was ever found for the dogs. The owner then took the case to Superior Court, but further delays occurred when his attorney failed to show up for court. The owner chose to represent himself and the judge granted him several extensions and opportunities to present his case, causing substantial increase in cost to the Town. On August 22nd, the Town and the owner received the court's final determination which fully supported the results of the administrative hearing. The owner was once again given the opportunity to retrieve his dogs by complying with the stated conditions.

The \$3,800 in charges owed by the owner is nowhere near the estimated \$51,500 incurred by the Town in staff costs and legal fees. The dogs have been cared for at the animal shelter for close to seven months due to the owner's actions. When the female (who had had two previous litters) was in season, the shelter staff separated the dogs but kept them in adjacent enclosures. During their brief separation the health of the male dog, which was already showing signs of stress, worsened. He refused to eat or drink and was taken to the veterinarian for a check-up. Once he was put back in with the female, he began to drink water and eat his food. Staff determined that due to this unusual circumstance, it was better to allow them to have puppies than to let the male dog continue to suffer and possibly die.

Four of the seven puppies born on August 29th survived. The Town has offered to turn the puppies over to the owner pending agreement with conditions that release the Town from future liability.

Both adult dogs have been well cared for by the shelter staff. They share the largest, fully covered pen at the shelter; they have been vaccinated, wormed, regularly exercised outside of their pen and are well fed. The enclosure is cleaned daily. The dogs get toys, chews, treats, elevated beds with clean bedding to get them off of the concrete, an igloo and a kiddie pool. The dog owner has been permitted numerous visitations with the dogs at the shelter during this period.

The Town of Yucca Valley's Animal Control division works hard to protect animals *and people*. Unfortunately, there are aggressive dogs and owners who allow them to run loose. During this past year, the Town has responded to several dog attacks that left victims disfigured and/or handicapped for life. The elderly woman in this case was knocked down and bitten many times. Her jacket, which was torn up by the dogs, probably saved her from more serious injury. Where is she now? She suffers from nightmares of the attack, she does not take her daily walks anymore, and she lives in fear of the dogs returning to the neighborhood.

The Town ended up in control of these animals for the past seven months because it was

apparent from the preponderance of the evidence that the owner lacked control of his dogs and was unwilling to take responsibility for his actions that led to this aggressive behavior of the animals. The Town remains committed to protecting the health and safety of the public -- our citizens deserve no less.

The entire case history is available for public review on the Town of Yucca Valley website, www.yucca-valley.org.

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