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Pit bull 'Misjif' will be euthanized

Selectmen cite attacks on man, goat; owners plan appeal for dog 'who made mistake'

BY MELISSA MCKEON MMCKEON@HOLDENLANDMARK.COM

A pit bull that bit a Woodridge Road man in April and has been frightening neighbors on Woodridge Road and Shrewsbury Street has been ordered to be euthanized by selectmen due to what their owner says is just a mistake and neighborhood gossip.

Three-year-old Misjif, a pit bull belonging to Maryhelena Windsor- Cripps and Mark Cripps, was ordered euthanized by the select board at a dog hearing Monday night after the board heard neighbors' testimony about two incidents.

In one incident, Woodridge Road resident John Mellecker was in his yard while Cripps was walking Misjif, when Cripps stopped to talk. During the course of the conversation, Mellecker said Cripps told him the dog was friendly to people. But when Mellecker held out his hand to the dog, palm up, the dog attacked him, pushing him to the ground.

"What I next saw was Mr. Cripps struggling to get control of the dog," Mellecker said.

Mellecker required seven stitches to his wrist and was told by the physician who treated the injury near his eye that his glasses saved him from losing the eye. One of his wounds also became infected.

Mellecker said Cripps called and was "concerned and apologetic and remorseful" the next day. He told Mellecker the dog was going to be in quarantine and then they would be getting rid of it.

When the Crippses did not get rid of the dog after its 10 days in quarantine at Worcester Animal Rescue League, the neighbors became more concerned.

"That dog's a ticking time bomb," Mellecker said.

Maryhelena Windsor-Cripps said her husband should not have stopped to talk while walking the dog and that Mellecker should not have provoked the dog by holding out a hand palm up.

Windsor-Cripps also denied the second incident's seriousness, after neighbor Kate White testified she saw the dog drag down the Cripps' family goat, which was then euthanized. Windsor-Cripps said the bite was just a nip and the goat was euthanized because it was old.

She said they were suffering from the bad

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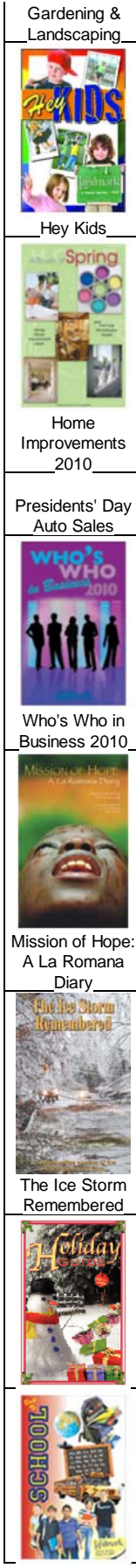
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reputation of pit bulls, due to other people's bad management of their dogs, and because the neighbors had been spreading what she termed as untruths about the goat incident.

"It's bad owners and gossip that cause the problem," she said. "I would ask that people calm down."

But the overwhelming concern of the neighbors during everyone's testimony was the neighborhood's children, who might have been more severely injured by an attack such as that endured by Mellecker. Mellecker himself said his

grandchildren were in the yard; a neighbor warned them away from the scene of the attack, where Mellecker also testified he saw Cripps trying, with difficulty, to get control of Misjif.

The Crippses both expressed regret for what happened to Mellecker; and neighbors spoke of the Cripps family with regard, saying they seemed to be nice people; but Misjif, herself, they'd prefer not to see around the neighborhood.

Other neighbors testified about incidents in which the dog's aggressive behavior had elicited concern from residents and a contractor in the neighborhood, all creating an atmosphere of uneasiness and fear.

Winfield Road resident Robert Duca said the "elephant in the room" was the notorious reputation of pit bulls, which are "dangerous."

"We expect our town and the police to enforce the law and protect us," Duca said.

Police Chief George Sherrill, who, along with Animal Control Officer Michael Sendrowski, testified at the hearing, said he recommended that the dog be euthanized because of the attack on Mellecker. Neighbors requested the hearing.

The Crippses have been issued a ticket for failure to leash the dog. They say they are appealing the ticket. Mark Cripps questioned the validity of the police report and the motives of the police in recommending the euthanization. He also said the hearing "seems like a witch hunt."

They deny that Misjif has escaped and roamed the neighborhood, saying it must have been some other dog. Sendrowski advised prudence and caution in making the decision, which should be based on the facts of the attacks that both parties can agree on. Sendrowski admitted he isn't a dog expert and did not witness any aggressive behavior on the dog's part. Nor did Health Agent Andrea Crete, whose job it was to order the quarantines due to the possibility of rabies.

There is also dispute over a report that West Boylston Police were called when neighbors reported the dog acting aggressively. West Boylston Police issued a letter to the Crippses saying they had no record of the call. Sherrill said it was likely because the call went out over the radio and didn't come through dispatch.

"I don't question the police integrity in this town," Selectman Anthony Renzoni said.

While several selectmen expressed regret at the action, they also said they were afraid that a future incident would involve a child.

"I don't think the board or the town can take that risk," Selectman James Jumonville said.

Selectmen voted four to one for euthanization, with White voting against and recommending behavioral specialists first evaluate the dog and owners. He also said banning the dog from town was an option.

Mellecker said he had mixed emotions about the board's action, but he was resigned to it.

"I didn't see any other option," Mellecker said.

"It's just not fair to kill a young dog who made a mistake," Windsor-Cripps said.

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