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Couple defends breed

By JACK POIRIER

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Local News - Dave Tendler says labeling all Staffordshire Terriers as vicious is pure bull.

The breed, more commonly known as pit bulls, has come under public scrutiny again following several high-profile maulings, including a recent attack in Sarnia.

Tendler, the proud owner of an extremely docile pit bull named Samantha, says media sensationalism and public ignorance has given the breed an unworthy reputation as unpredictable and vicious.

He pointed to media reports about the attack, in which police fatally shot the dog after it attacked its owner, sending her to hospital.

"It's not the breed. It's how an animal is raised," said Tendler, flanked by his wife Kristy and a faithful, albeit, cowering Samantha. "She's really calm, very docile and very timid."

As a photographer approached, Samantha did her best ostrich impression, burying her head under her owner's arms, tail between the legs for good measure.

The dog was rescued as a pup from an abusive breeder. Of the 13 puppies in the litter, only three-year-old Samantha has survived. If any pit bull had reason to be vicious toward people it's Samantha, her owners say.

"I've never heard her bark, not once in three years," Kristy said. "She still has (chew toys) from when she was a puppy."

In fact, the dog is often assaulted by the couple's six-year-old cat, Puma.

"Careful, he will bite," Kristy warned an Observer photographer. But there's no law prohibiting vicious kitties, she joked.

The Tendlers have undertaken all the registration requirements mandated by law for their dog. Samantha is also marked by an identification microchip and is muzzled whenever outdoors.

They contend the province's pit bull law, which prohibits owners from breeding or acquiring new dogs, while placing heavy restrictions on current owners, is canine prejudice.

Coupled with what they call sensationalized media reports, it's no wonder the public runs scared every time they take their pooch for a stroll, they say.

"People will go out of their way to walk around her," Dave said. "It makes me mad. She doesn't have leprosy. She's a dog."

Dave said if people would educate themselves, they'd be more understanding of the breed.

To help, he's posted pictures and videos on the popular YouTube website, showing his dog nuzzling up beside babies, playing with his 10-year-old son and lovingly laying in his owners' arms.

"Dogs are like children. If you raise them properly, they'll develop properly," Dave said.

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