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## Court orders husky destroyed

BY JEFFREY HAGE [jeff.hage@lee.net](mailto:jeff.hage@lee.net)

Suzanne Rutsch says her dog Dakota has never been a threat to people and would never attack a person.

But Judge Thomas Barland wasn't willing to take that chance Thursday.

Barland ordered that a male husky owned by Alexander and Suzanne Rutsch, 12797 44th Ave., be destroyed after hearing testimony from six witnesses highlighting more than three years of vicious attacks -- and one death -- at the hands of the couple's dog.

The village of Lake Hallie petitioned the court, calling for the dog's death after it attacked a Shih-Tzu in a neighboring yard.

Lake Hallie Attorney Brian Wright told the court, "We have reasonable grounds to believe the husky possesses a significant threat to public safety, health and welfare."

And while Wright acknowledged that the dog never attacked a human, the facts of Saturday's attack gave the village a heightened concern that people could be endangered if the dog were to remain alive.

That's because the 11-year-old son of Scott and Cindy Prueher was in his yard with a friend playing with his two dogs when the husky came into the yard and grabbed the Shih-Tzu by the neck, puncturing its neck.

"In this latest incident, two 11-year-old boys were playing in a yard when the husky viciously attacked the dog. What would have happened if either had tried to rescue the Shih-Tzu," Wright asked?

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The severity of the attacks are escalating, and the husky has now become a risk to humans, he argued.

Barland heard testimony from Dave Peloquin, 12675 44th Ave., whose miniature schnauzer was attacked by the husky in October 2002.

The judge heard from Brian Burger, who watched his sheltie get mauled to death by the husky this past February in his own backyard.

Barland also heard from Cindy Prueher, the owner of the Shih-Tzu, who detailed numerous accounts of dog attacks and the fear she and her family experience when they see the Rutsch dogs running at large.

Lake Hallie officer Jeanne Johnson, Sgt. Ken Taylor and Chief Gale Haas also testified regarding their numerous trips to the Rutsch residence on dog-related complaints.

"I don't dispute anything that's been said," Suzanne Rutsch said.

Having said that, she appeared to be able to justify the attacks in her mind.

"Huskies are prey-driven and hunters and can't be trusted with small animals," Rutsch told Barland. "But with people, they're overly-friendly."

Alexander Rutsch added: "It's chewed through a chain-linked fence. We can't find anything to hold it."

"That's typical of a husky," Suzanne Rutsch said.

Barland seemed surprised at Rutsch's comments and asked that a court reporter read back her remarks to the court.

"It appears to be your position that the dog hasn't harmed human beings, Barland said.

But statutes regulating the holding and destruction of animals don't address whether it harms a human, Barland said.

"It's being held on the grounds that it possesses a significant threat to public health, safety and welfare -- and that means more than if it's a danger to human beings," he said.

Barland told the Rutschs that the husky's history is full of

disturbing events.

"People consider animals a part of their family, and when they see an attack, it's disturbing," Barland said.

"There's a reasonable probability that if someone came along and saw your dog attacking another dog and tried to interfere, there would be a threat to their safety," he said. "People just don't know how to react in that situation."

Suzanne Rutsch said she didn't dispute that her dog should be euthanized. Barland then granted Rutsch's request to stay the euthanization order for 48 hours so members of her family could say their goodbyes to the animal.

Because the Rutschs were being cooperative in the efforts to put down the dog, Wright withdrew the village's request for the reimbursement of costs associated with destroying the animal -- including the costs of detention, euthanization and disposal of the husky.

Cindy Prueher said the fact that the dog was ordered to die did not come as a relief to her. She is still concerned because the Rutschs still own a female husky -- a dog he vet has told her will become more vicious as a result of the loss of its mate.

But for Gary Burger, the man who lost his family pet in February after being attacked by the husky, sitting through the court hearing was a good experience.

"We can't ever bring Lassie back. We have tried to move on, and this gives us some closure," Burger said.

Reach Jeffrey Hage at [jeff.hage@lee.net](mailto:jeff.hage@lee.net).

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### **Charges dropped against Evan Zimmerman**

JUNEAU -- Declaring that his prayers had been answered, an emotional Evan Zimmerman left the Dodge County Courthouse Friday a free man after the murder case against him was dropped.

### **Family offers reward in Klinger's death**

Whether John Klinger was murdered or died because of accident nearly two years ago remains a mystery. The family of the former Chippewa Falls school board member is hoping a \$10,000 reward will finally provide some answers.

**Jim Falls man shot in accident**

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