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Northwest Press



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Township woman wants vicious dog laws

By Kurt Bakscheider Staff Reporter

GREEN TWP. - Helen Vassiliou would like to see Ohio take a stronger stance against vicious dogs.

Her mother has twice been attacked by their neighbor's hybrid German shepherd, and her Yorkshire terrier, which was recently attacked for the fourth time, was nearly severed in half by the vicious dog, she said.

The dog first attacked her mother in September 2004 and the second attack took place June 13, she said.

Vassiliou said her mother had to be rushed to the hospital both times for treatment of puncture wounds.

"All the attacks have taken place on our property," she said. "It's just preposterous."

More disturbing than the physical and mental wounds caused by the attacks is the fact that the police, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the county humane society cannot do anything about the neighbor's dog, she said.

In 2004, the Ohio Supreme Court overturned a state law regulating vicious dogs, and now neither the state nor the township has authority to remove vicious dogs from their owners, Vassiliou said.

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"We need a law, not only in Green Township but in the state of Ohio as well, that says if you harbor a vicious dog or your dog bites another person you will face a serious penalty," she said.

Vassiliou's neighbor, Douglas Kramer, was cited by the Hamilton County Sheriff's Office on June 13 for allegedly failing to confine a dog.

Kramer said he doesn't consider his dog to be vicious and doesn't think his dog is purposefully attacking Vassiliou.

He said his dog, who is not friendly to other dogs, was likely going after Vassiliou's dog and she was attacked when she stepped in to break up the two animals.

"I admit the dog shouldn't be getting out of the yard," Kramer said. "That is my problem."

He said he thought he fixed his fence to keep his dog on his property, but the most recent attacks took place after his dog was able to escape by getting under the fence.

"I had a false sense of security," he said.

Vassiliou said her neighbor has the right to own a dog, but her mother also has the right to enjoy her own property and home on Werk Road.

"My mother is not provoking his dog," she said.

"She is 56 years old and all she wants to do is work in her garden."

Green Township Police Sgt. Gary Wilhelm said, "Currently there is nothing enforceable that deals with vicious dogs."

He said police officers can only issue a failure to confine citation to a resident whose animal run loose from their property.

The first offense for failing to confine a dog is a minor misdemeanor and carries a \$25 fine plus court costs, Wilhelm said.

Penalties increase as the number of violations increase. If a dog gets loose four or more times the offense is a misdemeanor carrying a \$250 fine and up to 30 days in jail, he said.

"We get a fairly good number of calls for dogs running loose, it's not uncommon," he said.

Before the state Supreme Court deemed the vicious dog law unconstitutional, Wilhelm said it was a more serious offense for dog owners if their dog was considered vicious and attacked a person.

"The law as it was written was good," he said.

"We have a need now for legislators to re-write the law to fit the constitution."

One reason the state Supreme Court overturned the law is because it did not contain a good method for determining how a dog gets labeled as being vicious, he said.

Justices decided there should be a court hearing to determine whether a dog is vicious before going forward with the harsher penalties, Wilhelm said.

Vassiliou said she wants township residents to be aware that laws against vicious dogs do not exist and encourages people to write state lawmakers.

"We need dog laws," she said.

"I have horrific photos of what that dog did to my mom and my dog."

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