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# Guide Dog: Protector or Predator?

After an incident with a Maltese, man's German shepherd may be euthanized.

By **JOY COCHRAN**  
The Ledger

WINTER HAVEN -- Bob Jardine, who is blind, takes his guide dog Miden everywhere he goes, and the pair are a familiar sight in Winter Haven.

They visit Gold's gym, ride city buses, use the library and attend meetings at City Hall. At Christmas, Jardine, 66, with Miden by his side, is a Salvation Army bell ringer.

But Miden's future is in doubt.

A complaint filed by an officer for the Polk County Sheriff's Animal Services Department accuses Miden of being a vicious dog following an incident at a Winter Haven business last month.

In Bartow on Friday, a hearing officer will listen to testimony, review evidence and decide whether the 8-year-old German shepherd is dangerous and should be euthanized.

It's a case that has angered advocates for the blind, who promise they will be by Jardine's side at the hearing.

"They're trying to make my dog vicious because he was trying to protect me," Jardine said. "My dog is trained to keep me safe. I'm sincerely sorry for this whole event."

The trouble started when Jardine and Miden went to the Spinal Restoration clinic business on Avenue A Northeast on June 12.

Inside was another dog, a 10pound Maltese named Buddy, according to



enlarge

### PAUL JOHNSON/THE LEDGER

Bob Jardine is shown with is guide dog, Miden, who may be euthanized because of a fight with another dog.

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Polk County Animal Control records.

Jardine and Buddy's owner, Angie Horton, say that an altercation between the two dogs ensued. Jardine said he was expected at the office, where he and Miden had visited before, to pick up political petitions. He's been active in Winter Haven politics and is currently a candidate for Seat 1 on the Lake Region Lakes Management District board.

"I went in two steps into the office and said 'Hello,' " Jardine said. "Someone said, 'You better get the dog,' and all of a sudden there was screaming and yelling."

Being blind, Jardine said it's like he's in a dark room, so he decided the best place for him was on the floor and he went down.

"It (the small dog) chewed up fingers on my right hand, fingers on my left hand and my elbow," Jardine said. "It was like a piranha."

Someone poured hot water on Jardine and the two dogs, Jardine said.

"I was yelling, 'can somebody please help me? Get me a towel!' Nobody would respond."

Someone at the business called 911 and emergency medical technicians checked and treated Jardine, who refused transport to the hospital, according to Winter Haven Police Department records.

According to records, police spoke with Horton, who owns Spinal Restoration, the day after the incident.

Horton said Buddy was on the back of the couch in the lobby when Jardine and Miden arrived. When Buddy went under a chair, Miden charged the small dog, Horton told police.

"Horton said she came from back behind her desk and attempted to get her dog from Jardine's dog's mouth, but she was unable to so she poured two cups of water on the dog, but the dog still continued to bite her animal," the police report states. "Horton said that she then poured another cup of hot water on Jardine's dog's face and the animal released her dog."

Horton told police Miden bit her right hand and that Jardine was bitten as he attempted to get Buddy out of Miden's mouth.

When police arrived at the business, Horton had already left to take Buddy to Garden Grove Animal Hospital, where according to police records, Horton said the dog had four hours of surgery.

"My dog was ripped to shreds," Horton said. "It is a miracle he is still alive."

Horton said Miden has a vicious side.

"I'm the victim here," she said. "I tried in vain to get my dog out of this dog's mouth. With every blow I had I feared for my own life. That's a horrible feeling. This is just a very sad, horrible situation."

At Horton's request, Dr. Todd Beatty, the clinic's veterinarian, declined comment Friday.

In her review, Animal Services Officer Donna Seiler wrote: "Miden attacked another animal without provocation. Out of the realm of his training, Miden took his handler to the ground."

But Stephen Baker, Jardine's lawyer, said: "Miden's response to the attack by the Maltese was appropriate, considering Miden is a German shepherd.

Baker, who is also blind, continued: "As a blind person, I can certainly tell you we're invisible. We don't merit any regard. They want to take away a blind guy's seeing-eye dog. That's what they're shooting for."

Horton said the issue is about a vicious dog, not about a guide dog.

She said she has mixed emotions about the possibility of Miden's possible euthanization, but that she will likely take civil action after Friday's hearing.

Howard Kay, a lawyer with Lilly, O'Toole and Brown in Lake Wales, who was consulted by Horton, said Horton is most interested in guide dog owners being held more responsible for the actions of their animals.

Animal Services does not recommend whether Miden be euthanized, said Donna Wood, public information officer for the Polk County Sheriff's Office.

"We let the evidence speak for itself," she said.

Miden has been accused once before of attacking a small dog. In that incident, he held a puppy in his mouth in January 2005. The puppy's owner apologized when he learned that Miden was a trained guide dog, according to animal control records.

Guide dogs are trained to protect their owners, but not as attack dogs, said Jack Hayward, director of communications for Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation, the organization that provided Miden for Jardine.

"It's generally unlikely for our dogs to respond aggressively," Hayward said. "They're trained to ignore distractions. If any dogs are attacked, they will react to protect themselves and their owners."

A Fidelco representative will testify as an expert witness at Friday's 9 a.m. hearing at the Polk County Courthouse, Hayward said.

The hearing officer, assigned by Animal Services, will be Maria Gallo, who will listen to testimony from both sides before deciding Miden's fate, Baker said. State law protects guide dogs in certain circumstances, said Marion Gwizdala, president of the Florida Association of Guide Dog Users and a member of the National Federation of the Blind.

One law says "no dog may be declared dangerous if the dog was protecting or defending a human being within the immediate vicinity of the dog from an unjustified attack or assault."

"I don't know Mr. Jardine or his dog. Generally, guide dogs are not aggressive," said Gwizdala, who also has a guide dog. "I know if I were being attacked my dog would react and it would be defensive."

Another law requires all businesses open to the public also be accessible to seeing eye dogs, Baker said.

Rachelle Selser, the city's lakes program coordinator, was surprised to hear Miden is being accused of being a dangerous dog.

Jardine has taken Miden to the afterschool program at Rotary Park, where Selser was the former supervisor.

"We blindfolded children and Miden led them around the playground to show them how Miden keeps Bob from running into things and what it's like to be blind," Selser said. "I saw no aggressive tendencies during that presentation. The dog is always very well behaved."

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