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**OBSERVER EXCLUSIVE**

## Police dog attacks man walking home

**Officer apologizes; German shepherd**

**got away from him**

**KYTJA WEIR**

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Darrell Hargraves has owned three German shepherds. He'd never been bitten by them -- or any other dog -- until Sunday.

That's when the 33-year-old heard something behind him as he walked home after his Saturday night work shift and a few rounds of pool. He turned and saw a dog racing at him.

The German shepherd on the loose belonged to Charlotte-Mecklenburg police's K-9 unit. The dog, Sam, pushed him down, teeth bared.

The dog had slipped away when its handler stopped the vehicle to let the dog go to the bathroom, said CMPD spokesman Keith Bridges. "We're sorry that it happened," he said.

Hargraves was nursing puncture wounds on his stomach and scrapes on his hands, elbows and knees at his home Sunday.

"What are the procedures?" he asked. "I thought there were leash laws with regular people. With officers, I thought the dog has to be in sight of the officer at all times."

The Police Department will conduct an internal investigation of Officer M.T. Yoder, who handles the dog.

Because the dog was not wild and has all his vaccinations, it will not be euthanized, Bridges said. N.C. law requires a 10-day quarantine for all dogs, cats and ferrets that bite people, according to Charlotte-Mecklenburg police's animal control unit.

If the pet has a current rabies vaccination, this quarantine may take place at home. Sam will stay in a kennel at the officer's house.

Hargraves said he hadn't thought to worry when he spotted the K-9 police vehicle as he walked home around 3:30 a.m. Sunday. He turned the corner of South Boulevard onto Longleaf Drive in southwest Charlotte, just blocks from home when he heard the dog behind him.

The dog lunged. Hargraves tussled with it, trying to get it off.

Hargraves, who moved to the neighborhood recently, figured it was a local dog that had jumped a fence. He could feel a choke chain around the dog's neck so he knew it wasn't a stray. He tried to hold the dog down, keeping its mouth away from him.

Then he heard someone calling "Sam" in the distance.

"Is this your dog?" Hargraves shouted back.

The dog raced to a uniformed officer standing in the street.

The officer kept apologizing, Hargraves said.

Hargraves was OK but shaken up. His wife drove him to a hospital to get his wounds examined.

At 5-foot-10 and 197 pounds and as someone who regularly works out, Hargraves said he's glad the dog didn't attack someone smaller, such as a teenager or woman. "That dog was strong," he said.

Yoder told the Observer he couldn't comment much because of the pending investigation.

"I'm definitely sorry," the officer said. "Sam's a really good dog. He's caught a lot of dangerous people for the city of Charlotte." -- Staff writer *Melissa Manware* contributed.

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### ***Tips for Staying Safe Around Dogs***

*Every year dogs bite an estimated 4.7 million people, killing about a dozen, according to the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.*

• Always ask a dog's owner if you may pet the dog. Some dogs shouldn't be touched. It may be "on duty" as an assistance or service dog, or it may be injured, ill or afraid.

- *Approach a dog from the front or side -- not from behind. Hold your hands low and speak softly. Do not surprise a dog, force it into a corner, wave your hands in the air or scream at it.*
- *Beware of a dog that is barking, growling or showing its teeth. Stay away if its ears are back, tail is up, or its hair is standing up. Say "NO" firmly and slowly walk away with your arms by your side.*
- *Stay calm. Do not scream, stare into its eyes or run away.*

*SOURCE: American Kennel Club*

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