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Mystic River Press

STONINGTON ANIMAL LOVER MAULED BY RECENTLY ADOPTED DOG

By Tom Kasprzak - The Sun Staff

Online Poll
 The third annual Mystic St. Patrick's Day Parade will step off Sunday at 2 p.m. from the Mystic Seaport. What do you enjoy most about this growing tradition?

- Traditional bands
- Irish music
- Irish dancers
- The floats
- The marching groups
- Veterans groups
- Firefighting units
- Other

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STONINGTON - When Nancy Guastini and her fiancé Ted Manikas arrived to retrieve an adult chocolate Labrador at a Staten Island couple's home on March 11, they knew the dog had been abused. However, they would not know the exact extent until they arrived home later that evening. And never could she ever anticipate that she would be mauled by the adopted canine.

For Christmas Manikas gave a yellow lab to Guastini, who has been an avid pet lover for her entire life of 40 years, he said.

"She lives for animals," he said.

He said that Guastini was upset after losing one of her longtime pets, another lab, just a short time ago. Guastini, who has been involved in helping animals - most recently helping to raise over \$9,000 for animal victims of Hurricane Katrina - felt that her new lab, Chloe, could use an older friend to help her along the way, according to Manikas.

The couple located a chocolate lab in Staten Island, N.Y., that needed to be adopted. Once they arrived at the home where the new dog was residing, the couple knew the animal had been abused, according to friend Barbara Cullen.

Manikas said he and Guastini were skeptical of how the chocolate lab would be with Chloe, but Guastini said she did not want to leave the dog where he was. The couple took the dog home, which "was an ordeal in itself," according to Manikas.

Once at home in Stonington, at about 9 p.m., Manikas said that Guastini took Chloe upstairs and put her in a separate room, while he walked the chocolate lab around the front yard to try and calm him down. Manikas said that once everything was secure in the home, he brought the dog inside and let him roam around the house.

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"He seemed all right, he seemed fine," Manikas said.

After he thought the dog was settled, Manikas said he went upstairs to check on Chloe, and heard Guastini shriek. When he came downstairs he saw a pool of blood on the floor and Guastini holding her face and pointing to the ground.

"Her lip was lying on the floor and she was pointing to it," Manikas said. "Her cheek and lip were gone and you could see inside her mouth."

The dog was pacing the room, according to Manikas, who said the dog was no longer attacking, but seemed anxious.

"He knew he did something wrong," Manikas said.

Manikas called 911, and brought the dog upstairs and locked it in one of the bedrooms, according to Manikas. Guastini was transported via ambulance to Lawrence and Memorial Hospital, where her face was stitched and bandaged.

Cullen said that Guastini is now at home and working with a plastic surgeon in Norwich who seems hopeful that he can repair some of the damage. The dog that attacked Guastini is currently at the Stonington dog pound, and by state law must be quarantined for 14 days before any action on the dog's future takes place.

"She's worried about the dog more than anything else," Manikas said.

He added that it is not the dog's fault that he attacked, rather it's the people who abused the pup during it's lifetime.

Cullen said that Guastini explained to her that she was ordering the dog to sit, which it did, and when she bent over to reinforce the action, he lunged at her.

"For somebody like her to get hurt like this is ironic; (she's) someone who does so much for animals," Cullen said.

Noreen Dion, Guastini's twin sister, said that Guastini's spirits were good on Friday, and she is healing well.

"She's actually doing very well, she's doing much better," Dion said.

Guastini's surgeon said there will be a series of three surgical procedures before she is healed, according to Dion, and noted that the surgeon seems confident all will go well. However, the procedures could take almost two years until they are completed, Dion said.

Unfortunately, Cullen said that Guastini does not have health insurance and was about to start a full-time job where she would have received those benefits. Though an estimate for the cost of the surgery is unknown, Cullen has began collecting funds to help pay Guastini's expenses.

So far, Cullen has collected \$1,800 from merchants at the Olde Mystick Village, where Cullen runs the Mystic Scrimshander store.

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Clockwise, left to right: President Eisenhower, Bing Crosby, Wayne Gretzky, Walt Disney, Alan Shepard

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Cullen has set up a fund at the Liberty Bank in the Olde Mystick Village for those who are willing to donate towards Guastini's surgeries. Those interested in donating can do so by making a payment to the Nancy Guastini Fund, and sending a check or money order to Liberty Bank, c/o Olde Mystick Village, 25 Coogan Blvd. Mystic, CT. 06355.

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