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Woman attacked by dog

By [John Ramsey](#)  
Rocky Mount Telegram

Thursday, March 29, 2007

A Labrador retriever attacked a 75-year-old woman Tuesday in the Northgreen community, while its owner allegedly screamed profanities at her and told her she "got what she deserved."

Estelle Lopez was tending to her flower garden on Brassie Club Lane at about noon when she said she heard her neighbor, Thomas Van Ness, yelling at a car and chasing it down the street with his dog, Rocky, and his son.

That eventually led to a confrontation in Lopez's yard in which Rocky, an 80- to 100-pound chocolate Lab, twice bit her back and then, as she covered her face for protection, mauled her right arm.

"He got the dog by the collar and yanked it, and that's what tore up my arm," Lopez said in her home Wednesday, her forearm stitched and bandaged from wrist to elbow. "(Then) he went home and left me."

Rocky Mount police charged Van Ness, 61, with a felony count of assault with a deadly weapon inflicting serious injury and a misdemeanor count of allowing a dog to run at large.

Capt. Wayne Sears said Lopez's injury is the most serious dog bite in the city in more than two years, when a pit bull attacked a woman near Myrtle Avenue.

Van Ness' bond was set at \$10,000, and he was released after posting bail. Van Ness, whose first court date is Friday, could not be reached for comment.

Rocky – whose rabies shots are current, according to police – will be quarantined for 10 days as required by state law.

The animal control division will submit a report of the incident – which will include a recommendation for what action to take concerning Rocky if he is deemed dangerous – to Rocky Mount Police Chief John Manley.

Police have several options to recommend for dangerous dogs, including requiring removal from the city, adoption by another person or an animal rescue group, a secure fence or euthanasia.

Rocky has no previous record of biting people, police said.

Van Ness is notorious for screaming at people as they drive past his home at what he apparently believes

are excessive speeds, said neighbors, who describe the area as otherwise quiet and peaceful.

"It just happened to be my car (Tuesday)," said Elaine Van Hoose.

Lopez will make her second trip to see a doctor today and expects to be referred to a specialist. She was treated at Nash General Hospital on Tuesday.

The bite cut to the bone, and "the flesh was falling out," she said.

Lopez's son and daughter came to Rocky Mount to care for her, and several neighbors have stopped by to check on Lopez, but Van Ness has not called to ask about her health or apologize, she said.

"I was in my own yard, and I was working in my own flower beds," said Lopez. "If you want to have a dog and love your dog, that's fine. Just keep it in your yard."

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