

Crookston DAILY TIMES

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Boy home after dog attack, with 450 to 600 stitches

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By Mike Christopherson, Managing Editor

A Crookston boy was discharged from Altru Hospital in Grand Forks Wednesday, two days after being attacked by a dog on South Ash Street. Wyatt Fillion, 8, a second-grader at Washington School, received 450 to 600 stitches on his face, neck and arms, his mom, Christine Fillion said today.

"It's bad. He's pretty bad," she said. "But he's a beautiful child."

Even though Wyatt wants to go back to school, his dad, Rick Fillion, who lives on South Ash a couple houses away from where the dog lives, said he probably won't return to school until the fall. "It all depends on his prognosis and his pain," he said.

The dog, an Akita, is currently impounded. Police Chief Tim Motherway said the city is taking the necessary steps to have the dog declared a dangerous animal. That would likely result in it being euthanized, he said, unless the owners pay the considerable expense and take the many precautions that would be required to keep an animal that's been officially declared dangerous. The Crookston Police Department, Motherway said, is bypassing the normal warning that a pet owner would receive in the event of a bite on a person because the dog bit someone else on April 28. That person was Wyatt's little sister, Haley, 6.

"The dog was on a chain in their backyard and she went over and pet it," Christine explained. "It was one bite, in her stomach, but it was deep. They couldn't get any stitches in it. I think the only thing that saved her is that she has a blood-curdling scream."

Late Monday afternoon, Rick recalled, they had an appointment to get to but there was a little bit of time and Wyatt asked if he could ride his bike with some friends. Soon after, he came in contact with the dog.

Motherway said the police were called by RiverView Emergency Room personnel at 5:15 p.m. Monday regarding a dog bite. "The victim bitten by the dog had severe lacerations on his face," Motherway said.

Wyatt was subsequently transported to Altru Hospital.

An officer left RiverView and returned to 432 South Ash Street, where he spoke with the dog's owner and interviewed witnesses. The brown and black Akita, chained in the backyard, was subsequently impounded. At the request of the CPD, the city attorney's office has begun the process of having the Akita declared a dangerous dog, Motherway said.

Motherway, asked by the Times for the identity of the dog's owner, said he would consult with legal counsel on what he's legally able to release. At press time, he said he had left a message for legal counsel that had not yet been returned.

According to Wyatt's mom, the boy said the dog was not leashed when he was bitten. But Motherway said that witnesses at the scene said the dog was chained in the backyard. While he doesn't know how long the leash was, the police chief said it's a tight area with

small yards, garages and sheds in close quarters. He said it's his understanding that Wyatt emerged from an area between a garage and a shed and startled the dog.

A plastic surgeon was involved in Wyatt's treatment at Altru, and Christine said it's likely that there will be scarring. He lost skin by one of his eyes and also a piece of his lip.

"The first thing he said when he woke up in the hospital was, 'What do I look like?'" she said. "He's pretty banged up."

Judging by the wounds on his arm, Christine said it looks like the dog was trying to drag Wyatt, or that witnesses were trying to pull Wyatt away from the dog. "He said he had to crawl away," she said.

Wednesday, students at Washington School made get-well cards for Wyatt. Christine said his house is already full of balloons.

"He's getting a lot of support," she said. "Obviously, this is something no one ever wants to see their child go through."

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