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Bite brings kennel under scrutiny SOUTHWEST VA. INVESTIGATION PROMPTS NEW STATE LAW

December 26, 2008 12:35 am

BY FRANK DELANO

A Northern Neck kennel has a poodle problem. Lots of them.

In fact, Dalin Kennels of Richmond County apparently has too many dogs to comply with a new state law that goes into effect Jan. 1. The law will limit to 50 the number of dogs that can be kept in a kennel.

Kennel owner Lynn DeRosa declined to say how many dogs are at the kennel. She obtained licenses Nov. 18 for 160, according to county records.

"Too many to count," said Animal Control Officer Kim Lindberg, who inspected the kennel.

According to DeRosa's Web site (dalinkennels.com), she has been breeding, showing and selling championship toy and miniature poodles since 1965.

But a recent dog bite at the kennel has brought it under legal scrutiny and raised concerns by animal-welfare activists about the condition of some of DeRosa's dogs. Descriptions of the kennel and the dogs vary widely and could not be verified.

DeRosa declined to answer questions submitted to her by e-mail. She did not respond to a request for a tour of the kennel by The Free Lance-Star.

"I am going to withhold my answers on suggestion from my attorney. At a time better suited, I will give a complete statement," DeRosa said in an e-mail reply.

Cheryl Slavnik of Gloucester said she came to the kennel Nov. 13 to buy a dog. She said the prices of the dogs ranged from \$650 to \$1,500. She said she was playing with four poodles in a pen when one of them bit her arm.

The bite did not require medical treatment, she said. She said the bite troubled her less than the condition of the dogs and the kennel.

"I was disgusted. I thought I was going to be sick in my stomach, the stench of the kennel was so overwhelming," Slavnik said.

"The dogs were living in what looked like rabbit hutches with wire floors stacked on top of each other. I left in tears and cried all the way home," said Slavnik, who was accompanied by her son and daughter. "We washed our clothes as soon as we got home."

Slavnik reported the bite. Lindberg, the county's animal control officer, visited the kennel the next day.

"The dogs were fine," said Lindberg. "Some of them could have used a haircut, but, for the most part, they were healthy."

Lindberg said the kennel "had a strong odor of urine" and she saw "fecal material in some of the runs." She said DeRosa told her that she had not had time to clean the kennels before Lindberg arrived.

VET: DOGS, KENNEL CLEAN, BUT VACCINATIONS NEEDED

The dog-bite investigation by Lindberg and the Virginia Department of Health revealed inadequate records of rabies vaccinations at the kennel, said Samuel F. Marston, a Warsaw veterinarian.

On Nov. 17, Marston said he went to the kennel and vaccinated 139 dogs.

"They've had a lot of dogs there for a long time and have taken good care of them. I found the dogs in good shape. The kennel was very clean. I did not see one dog that was thin. I did not see one, single flea," Marston said.

The dogs were also clean, Marston said.

"I pay careful attention to my hands," the vet said. "I guess I wash them 50 times a day. When I finished vaccinating all those dogs, my hands were clean."

On Nov. 18, DeRosa went to the Richmond County Treasurer's Office in Warsaw and paid \$160 for eight kennel licenses. Each license covers 20 dogs.

According to Treasurer's Office receipts, it was the first time since March 15, 2004, that the kennel had been licensed by the county.

The receipt was issued to Lynn K. Liddington, De-Rosa's married name. She is the wife of Kelly Liddington, the popular, respected Virginia Extension Service agent in Richmond County since 1987.

In her conversations with the Liddingtons, Lindberg said she also told them that they must remove dogs from the kennel to meet the new 50-dog limit Jan. 1.

On Nov. 21, Kelly Liddington took six poodles to the Westmoreland County Animal Shelter, which also serves as Richmond County's dog pound. On Nov. 28, he took six more.

"We chose the option of placing the animals with the shelter to facilitate the colony reduction and to ensure that they would be placed in homes with spay/neuter requirements as a part of the placement," Kelly Liddington said in an e-mail.

According to shelter records, the poodles stayed at the shelter for several days. Three of them were adopted. Nine were transferred to two rescue organizations in Fauquier County and southern Maryland.

RESCUERS: DOGS 'FILTHY,' CONDITIONS 'EXTREME'

The Maryland rescuer, who asked not to be named, said the four dogs she received from the shelter Nov. 28 were all "skeletons, skin and bones" with feces and urine matted in their hair. One female dog lacked its lower jaw, she said.

"Her complete lack of a lower jaw is the most extreme case I've ever seen," she said. "She can't get food into her mouth. It's pathetic."

Two of the other dogs "were so filthy and so overgrown that I couldn't even see their eyeballs." She said it took hours to groom the dogs and "a couple of baths to get the stink out."

One of the poodles sent to Maryland and one sent to Fauquier have been adopted.

Carla Wenger of the Chance Foundation at Catlett received five of the dogs Dec. 2 from the second batch Kelly Liddington surrendered at the shelter. The hair of the dogs she received had been clipped "but their condition was really quite sad," she said.

"Most of them were missing most of their front teeth. I can't swear to it, but that's usually a sign of dogs chewing on their crates all day long because they've got nothing else to do," she said.

"They were also so severely emaciated that not only were their ribs poking out, but their their spines were sticking up. It's obvious that none of them have ever been on a leash, but they're sweet and want to be loved."

The Richmond County animal control officer said she submitted the findings of her kennel inspection to Commonwealth's Attorney Wayne Emery, who turned the matter over to an assistant commonwealth's attorney in Hanover County.

Lindberg said the Hanover prosecutor found the most serious allegation that could be verified was failure to buy a license.

Lindberg said the prosecutor recommended seeking an agreement from the Liddingtons that would allow authorities to inspect the kennel with little or no notice.

"We're still waiting to hear back from their attorney about the agreement," she said Tuesday.

Lindberg said the Liddingtons have offered through their attorney to let her inspect the kennel again. She said she doubts the inspection will occur before Jan. 1.

Frank Delano: 804/333-3834
Email: fpdelano@gmail.com