



Wednesday, Feb 20, 2008

Posted on Wed, Feb. 20, 2008

## Dog-on-dog attack has officials rethinking park rules

By SALLY CLAUNCH

Star-Telegram Staff Writer

ARLINGTON -- Barbara Steen thought Saturday was a good day to take her 8-month-old great Dane puppy to the city's off-leash dog park.

Moosie had visited the park before without any problems. But this time, he wasn't so lucky.

Steen's dog was attacked by a black Cane Corso named Felipe. It grabbed Moosie by the throat and pinned the 102-pound puppy. Bite wounds on Moosie's neck are infected, requiring antibiotics. The puppy's neck had to be shaved to treat the wounds, which must be drained twice a day.

"Someone could have been killed or bitten in that situation... It was horrifying," Steen said.

It was the first such incident reported since the Tails & Trails dog park opened in December off Southeast Green Oaks Boulevard, said Pete Jamieson, Arlington Parks and Recreation Department director. Jamieson said he plans to meet soon with other department heads to discuss what can be done about owners taking aggressive dogs to the park.

Park signs warn owners not to take aggressive dogs into the off-leash area, but Jamieson said more can be done.

The city could install an emergency call box so park patrons could contact authorities if a dangerous dog is loose in the park, he said. Steen said she tried to call animal control officers on her cellphone after the attack, but could not reach the department because it was a Saturday.

Jamieson said he may ask the City Council to consider an ordinance change allowing the city to pick up aggressive dogs in the park.

Animal control officers currently can pick up a dog that is roaming at large, but dogs in the off-leash area of the park are not covered in that definition, he said.

### Other parks

Grand Prairie has seen a handful of altercations between dogs at its dog park, said Jennifer Vuitel, Grand Prairie's animal services manager. The Grand Prairie City Council revised the city's animal ordinance in October to consider dogs in the park to be at large if they are not under the owner's control and if they pose a danger to other people or animals.

Fort Woof in Fort Worth's Gateway Park draws up to 2,000 dogs a weekend if the weather is nice, said Melody Mitchell, assistant director of parks and community services. Two dog attacks have been reported at Fort Woof since the park opened in 2003.

Patrons are "really good about policing themselves," Mitchell said, adding: "They've invested themselves in keeping the park a safe place to bring your dog."

### Dog fight details

Jamieson called Saturday's incident unfortunate.

Ron Ackerman of Duncanville, who owns Felipe, said the great Dane threatened his dog and that his dog was defending itself.

He said he teaches dog-bite prevention classes at some elementary schools in Waxahachie and tells the children that "just like all guns are loaded, all dogs bite." He also said his dog is a highly-trained guard and service dog.

If Steen had had better control of her dog, the incident wouldn't have happened, he said.

"They all started screaming, which is not the thing to do in that situation," Ackerman said. "Her dog got in my dog's face."

Witnesses tell a different story.

Dave Sandell of Arlington took his two terriers to the park Saturday. He said the great Dane went up to the Cane Corso, sniffed the black dog's nose and bowed his head.

"The black dog hunched down, not quite sitting, and lunged at him and took him down," he said. "The owner did not do a...thing to get his dog off the other dog. People came running, but he did nothing."

Steen started screaming, telling Ackerman to get his dog off of her dog.

Others joined in to help stop the attack. One woman took off her shoe and started clubbing the dog, Sandell said.

Ackerman then easily pulled his dog off, Sandell said, and was asked by park patrons to leave.

The attack lasted about 10 seconds, Ackerman said. But Jennifer Garrett, who organized the large-breed dog gathering that day via Yahoo Groups, said the attack lasted longer.

Ackerman was asked not to attend any more of the group's functions, Garrett said.

Ackerman said he takes the dog everywhere he goes and hasn't had any similar problems.

But he said, "I'm not going to take him to the dog park anymore."