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Congo, 3 other dogs, euthanized after attack

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TRENTON, N.J.

Congo, a dog who sparked a debate on immigration after biting a Honduran landscaper, was euthanized Wednesday after attacking his owner's mother in Princeton Township.

Congo and three other German shepherds jumped on Constance Ladd on Tuesday afternoon, causing her to fall as she left Elizabeth James' house, according to Princeton Township police. The 75-year-old had puncture wounds and lacerations to her forearm, chest and head, police said, and she complained of pain in her hip.

Police said it was not clear which dog or dogs caused the bites, but David Henry, the local regional health officer, said it may have been all four.

James' husband, Guy, notified police the dogs had been euthanized Wednesday morning.

"It was a tragic end to a tragic situation," Henry said, adding that it was the family's decision to have Congo, Lucia, Hunter and Bear euthanized.

A call to the listing for the James family rang unanswered Wednesday, but Guy James told The Times of Trenton the incident "wasn't an attack at all. It was dogs jumping."

"I don't want people who were supportive of Congo (after last year's landscaper mauling) to think they were supporting a bad dog," Guy James told The Times, which first reported that Congo had been euthanized.

Guy James said his mother-in-law forgot the dogs were there when she went outside.

"They wanted to come into the house, heard the door knob open and they jumped up," he said.

According to The Times, Guy James said he thought the local animal control officer, Mark Johnson, would push to have the dogs euthanized, and that's the only reason he put them down.



It was more than a year ago that Congo was ordered euthanized after mauling gardener Giovanni Rivera at the James' home last June.

In an interview with The Associated Press last year, Guy James contended that Rivera and other gardeners arrived early while the dogs were eating, and disregarded his calls for them to stay in their vehicle. He said Congo attacked Rivera after the panicked gardener grabbed his wife from behind and pulled her down, causing her to scream.

Rivera's lawyer and the municipal prosecutor disputed that account: They said the gardener never pulled her down and that James' wife couldn't control the animal.

The gardener was in the hospital for five days after suffering "hundreds and hundreds of cuts," a prosecutor said.

A municipal court judge ruled the dog had to be put down.

The case sparked widespread protests from animal lovers and Gov. Jon S. Corzine's office received over 10,000 pleas on the dog's behalf.

The case also created heated debate about immigration issues in the state because the victim was an immigrant from Latin America.

Both sides agreed to a plea bargain in April that spared Congo's life. Under the deal, Elizabeth James pleaded guilty to a municipal ordinance barring residents from allowing their dog to threaten or bite others and agreed to pay \$250 in fines.

The James family had already reached a settlement with Rivera that paid him \$250,000.

Rivera's lawyer, Kevin S. Riechelson, said his client had no comment on Congo being euthanized.

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