

News

Stranger removed dog after attack Case highlights holes in regulations of dangerous pets

By John Sullivan

Times Herald-Record

July 22, 2008 6:00 AM

GOSHEN — Animal control officials are worried about the whereabouts of a dog that bit its owner's thumb off over the weekend.

Christopher Gambale, the owner of the dog, kept his Cane Corso Mastiff "Diesel" muzzled and tied to a leash whenever he came to visit Pamela Leavy's Stack Road residence on weekends. Assurances that the dog was safe evaporated Saturday night, when Gambale removed the muzzle to offer Diesel a treat and the dog lunged at him, chomping his thumb off in the process.

Leavy's family then spent a harrowing 14 hours with the crazed animal trapped in their garage, as Gambale remained incapacitated in the hospital. In the end, a stranger unknown to either police or the family took the animal away, the family and police said, creating even more concerns about the dog.

Handling dangerous pets

The odd case highlights holes in the regulation of dangerous pets, as well as provided a warning to those who allow them to be around, said local animal-control officials. "This kind of shows you the irresponsibility of owners of animals that are dangerous or are raised to be the way they are," said Suzyn Barron, an animal control officer for the Warwick Valley Humane Society, which assisted in the call.

The nightmare for the Leavy family started after the ambulance whisked Gambale to the Arden Hill Campus of Orange Regional Medical Center. He was later taken to Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, where he underwent surgery to reattach his left thumb.

Goshen's town dog warden was on vacation, and no one was around to stand in. Leavy asked police to take the dog, but police officials said there was no place for the animal at their station, and that it seemed secured at Leavy's.

That left Leavy on her own when the dog threatened to break free, she said. She got the dog into her garage, using her van to push the portable basketball net it was tied to, then shut the door, she said.

Safety vs owner's rights

Calls to the Goshen Humane Society, as well as other area shelters and veterinary hospitals turned out to be futile, Leavy said. "I was screaming, 'You've got to get this dog out of here, I've got kids,'" she said.

Leavy said she was told by the shelters that they did not have the authority to take custody of the dog.

Barron, however, said such situations are not unusual.

After Leavy's phone calls, an unidentified person showed up at the house to pick up the dog.

The law gives owners of pets full rights over their dogs, including the right to spare or euthanize the animal if it has attacked them. It gives little guidance as to what to do with a dangerous pet if the owner is incapacitated, she said.

As of Sunday evening, neither Leavy nor police still had any knowledge of who removed the animal from Leavy's home.

Gambale's girlfriend, who was staying at Leavy's Sunday, said she knew of no arrangements by her boyfriend to have the dog picked up.

jsullivan@th-record.com