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Mother charged in vicious dog attack

By Mike McWilliams

Authorities on Friday arrested the mother of a boy severely injured in what authorities called the worst dog attack in Jackson County in recent memory.

Jennifer Lynn Higdon, 28, of No Name Road, Franklin, was charged with felony child abuse in relation to the dog attack.

Her 7-year-old son, Dalton Mathis, received life threatening injuries in the Feb. 19 attack, including 60 bites to his neck, throat and face, as well as a punctured voice box.

Dalton's stepfather, Lynn Higdon, said Dalton has fully recovered.

"He's back home. He's doing fine," Lynn Higdon said.

Higdon said he didn't know much about the charge filed against his wife and declined comment.

Shortly after the attack, Jennifer Higdon, who's also known as Jennifer Roberts, told the Citizen-Times her son arrived home from school, dropped off his book bag and went back outside before Cross, a 100-pound Shar-Pei-chow mix, attacked him. The dog had broken free from its chain, she said.

In a 911 call, an 11-year-old girl reported the dog was dragging her brother by the neck, and "he was bleeding everywhere."

Higdon said she had left home earlier to take her stepson to a doctor's appointment. Aside from her 11-year-old stepdaughter, who called 911, Higdon said her stepdaughter's 22-year-old half-sister was home at the time of the attack.

"She wasn't home, and she apparently failed to leave the child in proper care," Capt. Steve Lillard of the Jackson County Sheriff's Office said Friday.

The dog was mauling Dalton when a state trooper first arrived at the home on Pumpkintown Road in the Savannah community in Jackson County. Sheriff's deputies and paramedics arrived soon after, authorities said.

Officers freed Dalton from the dog and began first aid. The boy then was airlifted to Mission Hospital.

"That's the first one (dog attack) that I've been involved with where felony child abuse was charged," Lillard said.

After trying and failing to keep the dog contained for animal control officers, deputies said they were forced to shoot it. The dog tested negative for rabies.

The dog belonged to Carolyn Higdon, with whom Jennifer Higdon and her family have been staying

off and on for the past year, Higdon has said.

Higdon was also charged Friday in an unrelated matter with statutory rape and indecent liberties with a child involving a juvenile boy under 16 years old, according to the warrants.

Prior to the new charges filed Friday, Higdon was already in custody on an incest charge for an alleged incident last month. Her total bond is \$100,000.
