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Dog bites UPS man's finger off

Ken Leiviska Times-Press

ROCK SPRINGS - A UPS delivery man lost the tip of his right index finger when a dog bit him last week in a classic dog versus mail carrier incident.

According to the county sheriff's report, Richard Hehenberger, 50 from North Freedom, was injured when a Rhodesian Ridgeback in excess of 100 pounds bit him on the hand while he was delivering a package to the Rock Springs residence of Rebecca Mellenthin at E7246 Schmidt Road on the morning of Jan. 6.

According to the report, "She (Mellenthin) stated when Rick (Hehenberger) began to put the packages down on the step, the dog lunged at him breaking free of Rebecca's hold and did bite the tip of his finger off."

The tip of the finger was kept in a glove and placed in the freezer of the residence until medical personnel arrived, the report states, while the rest of the finger and hand were wrapped in gauze.

Loganville First Responders arrived on the scene initially, and Reedsburg Ambulance transported Hehenberger to St. Clare Hospital in Baraboo. The Sauk County Humane Society followed up on the incident, running several tests to confirm the animal was current with its rabies shot and other vaccinations.

In addition to testing, the animal was quarantined at the residence for 10 days, during which three separate visits from a veterinarian were made to verify it didn't have rabies.

According to the American Kennel Club web site, the Rhodesian Ridgeback was originally bred in South Africa to hunt big game, including lions, which packs of 20 or more completed successfully with great regularity. The AKC also characterizes the breed as athletic, energetic and typically even tempered and reserved around strangers.

Christian Russo, Sauk County Humane Society director, said most breeds of dogs were originally bred to hunt in some capacity, so proper training is necessary.

Because Rhodesians are athletic and intelligent, it is important they receive plenty of exercise, he said. However, Russo added that the slightest thing could have made the dog react the way it did with Hehenberger.

Russo said anything from getting too close to the dog's face, to the dog simply wanting to play with the packages being delivered could have led to the unfortunate incident. Trusting the owner of a pet is usually the most prudent practice, he added.

"The best thing to do is to leave an animal alone unless its owner invites you into their space because they'll know the temperament of their pet the best," Russo said.