

## Johnson gives update on dog cruelty cases

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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LAKE COUNTY &ndash; A dog that was hit by a semi and left without vet care for two days until her seizure by an animal control officer is preparing to start rehabilitation, while another dog taken into protective custody was euthanized due to his age and condition.

Animal Care and Control Director Denise Johnson said that &ldquo;Whiskey,&rdquo; a 6-month-old female pit bull taken from a Lucerne home by Officer Eric Wood on June 27, is on the mend after her painful ordeal.

However, a 10-year-old German shepherd dubbed &ldquo;Luke&rdquo; &ndash; taken into county custody by Wood earlier this month &ndash; had to be euthanized, Johnson said.

Johnson said Whiskey is getting ready for rehabilitation. She's spent the last month in the care of Wasson Memorial Veterinary Clinic in Lakeport.

Whiskey had been hit by a semi truck and left to cry in pain, with no medical care, in her owners' backyard in Lucerne for two days, officials reported.

The dog's back right leg has some nerve damage; although she can walk and put pressure on it, she drags the paw, so her leg is in a split to stop the paw from dragging, said Johnson.

Johnson said the next six weeks will be very important in Whiskey's recovery, and will determine if she'll regain use of the leg or if it will need to be amputated.

Johnson said Whiskey is in good spirits, and appears determined to run and jump again. But much of how she recovers will hinge on finding her the right foster home, which hasn't happened so far. The dog will require detailed care for the next eight weeks.

Whiskey's former owners &ndash; Paul Westergren, 43, and Carrie Malsack, both of Lucerne &ndash; are facing charges of animal cruelty and failure to provide veterinary care, the latter of which is a misdemeanor, said Johnson.

Johnson said Gary Bazzano of Middletown, Luke's former owner, is facing similar charges because he left the dog without vet care for two weeks. The dog had been unable to walk, and also had been found without food or water.

The older German Shepherd was euthanized at Clearlake Veterinary Clinic on July 16 after it was determined his age and weight &ndash; he was at 120 pounds &ndash; made it impossible for rehabilitation, said Johnson.

&ldquo;The most humane thing to do was to put him down,&rdquo; Johnson said. &ldquo;It was a very emotional day at Clearlake Vet and Animal Care and Control. It really is a shame that it had to come to this.&rdquo;

In recent weeks more animal cruelty cases have appeared to come to the surface, Johnson said. She said in just under two weeks, out of five animal cruelty reports, three were validated.

&ldquo;The number of reports are usually three to five per week but they aren't usually valid,&rdquo; she said.

Most of the time the reports come from a disgruntled individual &ndash; a neighbor or relative &ndash; or arise from issues with spouses, but usually it turns out that the animals are OK, said Johnson.

In other cases, she said the issues aren't affecting the animal's health and the owner is willing to change the situation, so Animal Care and Control works with them and checks back to make sure the changes have been made.

Lately, however, the reports are more often valid and the cases are extreme, said Johnson, so Animal Care and Control is trying to bring the problem to the attention of the public.

That's important to do, she said, because most times animal abuse leads to, or is happening hand-in-hand with, abuse of children, spouses or the elderly.

&ldquo;So if people see animal abuse and report it we can step in and, if needed, we can call for outside agency assistance to handle the human issues,&rdquo; she said.

To report animal abuse call Lake County Animal Care and Control, 263-0278.

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