

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

Group to protest dogs' return to owners

By Diana M. Alba Sun-News reporter

Posted: 12/22/2009 12:00:00 AM MST

LAS CRUCES - A group of animal welfare advocates plan to hold a demonstration in front of the Doña Ana County-Las Cruces animal shelter today as twin brothers Daron and Duryea Scott of El Paso pick up the remainder of their pit bulls.

Michel Meunier, who helped organize the event, said the group will hold signs directed to the Scotts and to the public at large.

"It's geared toward (the Scotts) because they're taking and removing these dogs that have been at the shelter for years," she said. "Some have gone literally kennel crazy, a lot of them are very dog-aggressive, and it's geared toward them in the sense that we may be holding signs saying, 'Please don't send them back to dogfighters' or things like that."

The Scotts were charged with dog fighting, but the case was dismissed after the New Mexico Court of Appeals ruled the search warrant used to obtain evidence against them had been obtained improperly. The twins have maintained the dogs weren't involved in a fight dog breeding operation.

The demonstration is slated to begin at 12:30 p.m., while the Scotts are slated to pick up the dogs around 1 p.m.

Doña Ana County authorities believe about 12 dogs belonging to the Scotts remain, said Curtis Childress, animal control supervisor for the county. But he said the Scotts contend they don't own three of those animals.

Meunier said she doesn't know how many people will participate in the demonstration, but likely at least five to 10 will show up. She said participants will be "independent no-kill advocates." She said they'll be careful not to violate any rules, such as blocking access to the shelter.

The event, Meunier said, is also aimed at raising awareness about the plight of pit bulls across the country, and the "consequences of dogfighting and ill-breeding, especially in this type of dog."

"Millions of pit bulls are neglected, abused and put down in shelters," she said. "Some shelters have a total no-pit bull policy. They see a pit bull and kill it immediately, without assessing the dog individually, just because of the prejudice against the breed."

Meunier said the Animal Services Center of the Mesilla Valley doesn't have such a policy.

Animal shelter director Beth Vesco-Mock said Monday she'd heard about the plan for a protest but declined to comment about it.

Vesco-Mock said she's been told that 12 of the Scotts' dogs will be brought to the shelter from foster families and from a county holding facility.

Childress has said the Scotts have indicated they'll first take their dogs to El Paso, but could send them to other cities after that. Childress said there's no limit on the number of dogs residents in El Paso can possess, unlike in Doña Ana County.

"Once we turn the dogs over to them, what they do with the dogs after that is up to them," he said.

A week ago, the Scotts picked up the first of their dogs - 12 in total. But they denied ownership of another five animals. The fate of the five dogs remained uncertain.

Meunier said demonstrators also want to advocate on behalf of the five dogs, to make sure they're given the best chance at survival.

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

"We ask that they be evaluated by a trained professional behaviorist before being put down and given a chance at rescue," she said.

Vesco-Mock said county animal control officers removed the five dogs from the shelter Monday morning.

Childress said that was done to make more room for the additional dogs that will be transferred to the Scotts today. He said animal control will seek a disposition from the court about the dogs, and "hopefully then we'll be able to do something with them."

"Probably, first thing done is we need to do an assessment to find out if they're adoptable or not," he said. "If it shows they're adoptable, we may be able to find homes for them. If it shows they're not adoptable, they may be euthanized."

The dogs have been in the custody of authorities since August 2007, when they were seized from two Chaparral properties and the Scotts' two El Paso homes.

Diana M. Alba can be reached at dalba@lcsun-news.com; (575) 541-5443.