

# LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

## **Charges undecided in fatal T or C mauling**

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LAS CRUCES - More than two months after a Truth or Consequences woman was fatally mauled by four pit bulls, the local district attorney has not decided whether to charge the dogs' owner.

Margaret Salcedo, 48, was walking to a friend's home Easter afternoon when she was attacked by the dogs, owned by former Truth or Consequences police Officer John Hardiman.

The family finally received her death certificate July 1, but has not yet been given a copy of the police report. That's because, even though the New Mexico State Police have completed their investigation, 7th Judicial District Attorney Clint Wellborn's investigation "is ongoing," Wellborn wrote in an email to the Sun-News on Tuesday.

In June, about 20 area residents brought a petition - containing more than 150 signatures demanding the case be presented to a grand jury - to Wellborn's office, hoping he would be swayed to charge Hardiman under the New Mexico Dangerous Dog Act. Under the act, if the owner of a dog who kills someone "knew of the propensity of a dog to inflict serious injury," the owner can be charged with a felony punishable by up to six years in prison.

Hardiman, a certified dog handler and trainer, fits that description, some are arguing.

"If you raise a pack of dogs, what do dogs do in packs?" said the victim's older brother, Gary Salcedo. "They tear up livestock. They kill pets. And I guess they got my sister, too."

Salcedo, 48, was walking when she was attacked at around 4:25 p.m. just a block from the Hardimans' home in the 1400 block of Nickel Street, according to the Truth or Consequences Police Department.

Salcedo reportedly tried to call for help on her cell phone before being bitten on her arm and dropping her phone. Another Truth or Consequences woman was able to call 911, but a man who tried to stop and render aid was allegedly attacked by one of the dogs, preventing him from leaving his car.

Officer James Harrington, who witnessed the attack, was forced to fatally shoot one of the dogs when it came at him before dispersing the remaining three dogs, according to police. Harrington and Officer Paul Wolfe attempted to administer first aid until an ambulance arrived to take Salcedo to Sierra Vista Hospital, where she later died.

The three surviving dogs were subsequently euthanized by Sierra County Animal Control.

The city held a public forum recently in consideration of toughening its own rules about violent dogs, but Gary Salcedo said it doesn't seem like the public's support for a criminal prosecution extends to the authorities.

"You get to the point, you just feel like maybe it's just being avoided, that's probably the best I could say," he said Friday. "I think they're just avoiding the situation. The DA's called me and said it's still under investigation, they're aggressively investigating it, but I don't know what to believe about that either. There's no charges. He hasn't paid (any) fines."

Gary Salcedo said it's still hard to process what happened to his sister, who he said was a "giving person - there was just nothing she wouldn't give for you, wouldn't do for you."

Brad Grower, a friend of Salcedo's family, agrees.

"No one thinks what happened to Margaret or her family was defensible and that's why the reactions of the government or the authorities are so frustrating," Grower said. "It's clear by the fact that we took that (petition) to (Wellborn) and got the signatures that people want this to move forward."

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