

Fri, September 17, 2004

Dog that kills owner not fit to have in public

Bob MacDonald shares reasons for imposing ban on pit bulls in Ontario

By **BOB MACDONALD**

A Reuters wire service story last week from Berlin stated:

"A German woman has died from fatal bite injuries inflicted by her dog which attacked as she lay collapsed from a seizure, police in the northern city of Bremen said on Friday.

"The 36-year-old woman was at home with two friends on Wednesday when she had a seizure and fell shaking to the ground.

"The pit bull jumped on the woman and inflicted lethal bites to her head and neck," said police spokesman Dirk Siemerling.

"The two men tore the 8-year-old dog, named Lucie, away from her owner and forced the animal into the garden. Police arrived later and shot the dog."

I mention this because it's another example of the unpredictably vicious, lethal behaviour of the pit bull dog -- the very animal that the Ontario government is now seriously considering to have banned throughout the province.

Any dog that would attack and kill its helpless owner while collapsed on the floor is not fit to have around -- let alone be allowed out among the public.

And it seems, according to the latest public opinion by SES Research in yesterday's Sun, that 58% of Ontarians want pit bulls banned compared to only 26% opposed. That sounds pretty conclusive to me.

The poll follows on a call by Ontario Attorney General Michael Bryant for Ontarians to let him know by e-mail whether they want such a ban. He's received many thousands at his e-mail address: michael.bryant@jus.gov.on.ca -- and is still calling on the public to send him their views.

Bryant's concern was sparked by the recent attack by two pit bulls on a 25-year-old man in Toronto. He received massive wounds to his body, legs and arm -- and those attempting to stop the attack feared for the man's life.

Police who were summoned had to fire 16 shots into the pit bulls before killing them -- and the animals kept trying to attack while mortally wounded.

Commented Bryant: "If we are banning or otherwise restricting other dangerous weapons, why would we not include these animals as well?"

Nik Nanos, president and CEO of SES Research, said:

Negative image

"I think the clear message is that a majority of Ontarians -- almost six of out of every 10 -- want the pit bull breed of dog off the streets. There's a certain image of the pit bull and it's not positive."

I'm sure such persons as Toronto mother Deborah Fowler would agree. Last December, she and Ryland, who was only 4 years old, were attacked by a pit bull outside their Rushton Cres. home. According to the mother, the dog's main target was the little boy:

"The dog wanted my son -- that's all it was interested in. Without provocation, the pit bull grabbed him. It didn't even growl."

In a split second, it had the helpless, screaming boy on the ground -- tearing at his back with its powerful jaws.

Only the all-out efforts of the mother and the heroism of neighbour Karl Vaartjes managed to finally subdue the animal -- with Vaartjes sustaining bites himself.

As I've said before, there's really no need for such a dog to be allowed in today's society -- especially an increasingly urban province like Ontario. Pit bulls were selectively bred in 19th century England to fight to the death in pits against each other -- with the audience betting on them.

Today, too many owners have them for the wrong reasons -- as sort of status symbols of their own toughness, etc. And others truly love the breed -- but that doesn't make them less unpredictably dangerous -- both to humans and other dogs.

Back in 1990, the city of Winnipeg imposed a ban on pit bulls. Since then, pit bull attacks there dropped from about 30 a year to one or less.

A pit bull ban imposed in Kitchener and Waterloo in 1997 puts the onus on the owners to prove their dog is not a pit bull -- thus getting past the claim by some owners that there is no such breed as a pit bull.

In Toronto, Police Chief Julian Fantino is backing a ban, noting that many of his officers are attacked by pit bulls every year. As AG Bryant says:

"You can't bring a Great White shark into a public swimming pool, so why should we have these potentially dangerous animals walking down Ontario streets?"

Makes sense to me.