

Determined duo fights for chained dogs

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Published: Sunday, July 11, 2010 at 4:30 a.m.

Last Modified: Saturday, July 10, 2010 at 11:32 p.m.

Two women on a crusade to change animal cruelty ordinances in Henderson County are now focusing on animal chaining. They've launched an "Off the Chain" campaign with the hopes of eliminating the practice of tying dogs up 24/7.

The last two years have been busy for Beth Nave and Valerie Lamoreux, who have submitted suggested ordinance changes to the county's Animal Advisory Board, spoken to county commissioners and appeared before the Hendersonville City Council to ask for more strict animal cruelty regulations.

Recently, they decided to concentrate on one issue in particular and started the Off the Chain campaign using multimedia and a billboard. The plight of a single dog sparked their mission, they said.

"It started with the Yon Hill dog, and the letters to the editor," Nave said. Residents wrote to protest the treatment of a dog on Yon Hill Road which is tied to its dog house. "There were 11 of us that met one morning to see if we could help this dog. Right then Valerie and I decided that the root of the problem was that there were no laws to stop (it). We separated from the others and began researching laws from local municipalities and from around the country."

Off the Chain

The group originally approached Henderson County and suggested a variety of changes to the animal cruelty laws. The county's Animal Services Advisory Board took the suggestions under advisement but took no action.

The women have refocused their efforts and founded Off The Chain, which promotes the banning of 24/7 chaining of dogs in Henderson County.

"We started Off the Chain on Facebook as a way to reach out to people," Lamoreux said. "We decided that the two of us needed help. We started the Facebook page and that has gone like wildfire. The billboard (on Four Seasons Boulevard) — we have been raising funds for that. Everything has been going really well, and we have a lot of support."

A similar group was founded in Asheville and successfully worked work with the city council and police department to ban unattended dog chaining in the city. Peggy Irwin is the founder of ChainFree Asheville. She moved to Western North Carolina in 2002 and

was surprised at the number of dogs that were chained and left alone. She felt the practice was cruel.

“I was a little shocked to see this behavior in the South,” Irwin said.

Six years later, in 2008, the city of Asheville planned to rewrite the animal control ordinance and Irwin said she spoke up about her concerns over chained-up dogs.

“To my surprise, there were a bunch of people who agreed with me, and we formed a little group,” she said.

Lamoreux and Nave contacted Irwin and asked for help in getting a similar law passed in Hendersonville. Irwin advised the Hendersonville women and helped present information at a meeting with city officials.

Hendersonville Mayor Barbara Volk said the meeting was productive, but the police chief believes the current ordinance is adequate. She wants to see the issue studied more before the city makes any decisions.

“I and the City Council appreciate their concerns,” Volk said. “We all agree on animal cruelty. We don’t want cruelty to animals in the city.”

Sheriff Rick Davis said his agency’s duty is to uphold the law. He expressed personal support for a stronger ordinance but also added a note of caution.

“We have to be careful,” he said. “We have to make sure any new ordinance or changes in the ordinance will be prosecuted by the District Attorney’s Office. Personally, and I am speaking for myself, I think the ordinance should be strengthened. Saying that, if it’s not done properly, there could be bad ramifications.”

Davis added that if the ordinance isn’t properly worded and examined, it could result in more dogs being put down.

“Some animal owners may just give their animals to the shelter, which could result in overcrowding and more animals being put down unnecessarily,” Davis said. “Whatever is done needs to be done with the welfare of all animals in mind.”

Nave and Lamoreux said their message isn’t that an animal can never be chained.

“We are targeting dogs that live their entire life on a chain,” she said. “We’re not talking about people who are just chaining their dogs outside for short periods of time.”

Lamoreux said the animals that would benefit from the ban would be dogs that are standing in dirt, have collars embedded in their necks and are never let off the chain.

“No one is going after someone who chains up their dog while they mow the lawn or have them chained to allow them some time outside,” Lamoreux said.

The women circulated a petition in support of an anti-chaining law a few months ago and said they received an overwhelming response, with 2,000 signatures in just two months.

Lamoreux said that if Henderson County passes an anti-chaining law, she and Nave will work hard to get a fence-building program started in the county.

While the women want a law passed, they are planning to move forward with other initiatives to continue their quest for improving the lives of animals. “We also want to do education in support of this,” she said. “Spay and neuter is important, and I believe it has been neglected in this area.”

Learning the political process

Nave and Lamoreux came together two years ago and met with other people who were concerned about chained-up dogs such as the one on Yon Hill Road. While the others wanted to help individual dogs, Lamoreux and Nave wanted to change the law. They saw the problem as larger than one individual dog.

“We feel they must be as equally frustrated as we are,” Nave said of the others. “Even if they could have saved the Yon Hill dog, there would have been another one tied in its place.”

The women researched laws around the country and approached the county commissioners. The county had rewritten its animal control ordinance in 2007, which transferred the authority of animal control to the Sheriff’s Office.

The commissioners listened and asked that the two women take their concerns to the county Animal Services Advisory Board. Any new ordinances would start with the advisory board before being heard by the board of commissioners.

The advisory board asked for their suggestions on ways to improve the ordinance. The women submitted their ideas, which were based on their research of other ordinances.

“At that time we felt like we had a victory,” Nave said. “Then we came back to the next meeting and discovered most of (the advisory board members) hadn’t read the ordinance suggestions.”

Associate County Attorney Sarah Zambon, however, had drafted a letter to the Animal Services Board with her concerns about the women’s proposed ordinance. The suggestions were far-reaching and made drastic changes to the animal control ordinance, she said.

“The board looked at the stuff they gave us, and they received my memo, and decided not to take action on any of the animal cruelty ideas,” Zambon said.

She believes the current law “gives law enforcement flexibility on a case-by-case basis.”

Focus on chained animals

After the setback, the women changed their approach. They wanted to promote a chain-free ordinance rather than a comprehensive rewrite of the county’s animal control ordinance.

“I think we were naïve,” Lamoreux said. “We can focus on one or two big things.”

They also decided that the city might be more receptive to their message. And they chose a more aggressive method. They and a group of supporters filled the City Council chambers during a meeting this spring.

“We felt invisible until we stopped caring if they like us or not,” Nave said.

The council agreed to listen and a meeting with the mayor, police chief and council member Jerry Smith was organized. The city decided to monitor its call logs for six months and determine if an animal cruelty problem exists in the city.

Nave and Lamoreux encourage people to call the city and report any animal abuse.

“It’s anonymous,” Lamoreux said. “People don’t have to worry about their neighbors getting mad.”

The women said they want to go back to the county commissioners but do not want to go before the county’s animal advisory board.

“We didn’t vote for these people,” Lamoreux said about the advisory board members.

Board of Commissioners Chairman Bill Moyer said the county has a good track record of working with groups and trying to make animal enforcement in the county better. He believes the laws are good, but they can always be better.

“I would be happy to listen to anything specific,” Moyer said. “I think we have a good history of tightening them up when needed.”

Lamoreux and Nave said that stubbornness and love of animals have kept them going.

“Every time they send us away, it just makes me more determined,” Lamoreux said.

“We have always known what our next step would be when we got rejected, because we kne

w we would be rejected,” Nave said. “We have hope that some day they will do the right thing.

Hendersonville, NC - The city of Hendersonville has no ordinance regarding the cruel practice of chaining dogs 24/7.

The group ‘[Off the Chain](#)‘ has been working hard for two years suggesting improvements to the animal ordinances. So far their suggestions have fallen on deaf ears. They need our help!

Contact Mayor Barbara Volk and ask to strengthen Hendersonville animal Cruelty ordinance. <http://ncvaw.org/tell-mayor-of-hendersonville-nc-to-go-off-the-chain>

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Source: :NCVAW list-serv