

HERMISTON

Woman weighed jail against saving starving dogs

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Robin Barker of Hermiston feared she would be charged with a felony after she took three underfed dogs from their owner. Then another animal rescuer helped save the day.

The Umatilla County Sheriff's Office received a call Friday, Nov. 20, from a woman who said a dog escaped its chain on the 2000 block of Geer Road, Hermiston, and ate one of her chickens. Barker serves on the board of Fuzz Ball Animal Rescue, a small rescue nonprofit in Hermiston, and said she saw a posting about that dog on Facebook, so she went to check out the scene.

She said she found wet, cold and underfed dogs; four adults and four puppies. They had no shelter nor food. One dog, she said, had vomited sticks and plastic it had tried to eat. She took videos and a partner took photos of the dogs.

She also took videos of interactions with the dog's owner, who the *East Oregonian* was not able to contact. Barker confronted him with the conditions the dogs were living in. In one he asserted he cared for and fed the dogs. But Barker said he also relinquished two dogs and four puppies to Fuzz Ball, and in one video he seems to imply he was OK with her taking the dogs.

Sheriff Terry Rowan said the following day the man reported Barker had stolen his dogs and he wanted them back. Rowan said pets are property under Oregon law. So a deputy told Barker to return the dogs or she could face an arrest for theft.

That threat, Barker said, turned her world upside down. She said she lost sleep, cried, worried about her own pets and what would happen if she could not attend to her aging father.

But she also said she could not return the dogs to a place where she felt no one fed or cared for them.

Suzanne Phillips is the director of Fuzz Ball. She said Fuzz Ball often accepts animals that law enforcement seizes, then finds the pets temporary homes and works to find them permanent homes.

"We don't have a shelter but since we have foster homes it works pretty much the same way," she said.

She said she did not understand why the sheriff's office did not do more to help the dogs. Fuzz Ball has previously worked with the agency to find homes for animals in need and it can do that while the outcome of a criminal case is pending and at no cost to the county. Fuzz Ball works entirely off donations, Phillips said.

Barker, Phillips and others then took to Facebook with photos of the dogs and directed viewers to contact the sheriff's office, which has its own Facebook page. Jodi Lambert of La Grande has helped Fuzz Ball earn grants, and she started an online petition to push the sheriff's office to take action. Monday evening it had about 3,500 backers, though many are anonymous.

Rowan said he does not monitor the Facebook page nor comment on it, but will direct staff when appropriate. He said it is a good tool to spread a message, and the sheriff's office did that with a response Saturday to address concerns about the dogs. Rowan called that an unusual move, but people needed to know the sheriff's office was investigating the case.

But Barker said she grew so worried Monday morning that she called District Attorney Dan Primus to find out if charges were pending against her, and he referred her to the county commissioners. She then spoke with Commissioner Bill Elfering and he brought it back up with Rowan.

Later that day, volunteer Carri Curtis of Hermiston

said she spoke to the dog owner and offered to buy all four animals if he relinquished ownership. The man asked for \$500, she said, but in the end took \$150. And, she said, he signed the paperwork.

Barker said she still wants to make sure law enforcement knows not to arrest her, and she planned to check in with an attorney. But for moment she felt relief.

ATTACK: Gunman reportedly motivated by opposition to abortion

Continued from 1A

shooting a university police officer who responded to the attack, as well as an Iraq war veteran and a mother of two inside the clinic. Nine other people were wounded.

After Monday's hearing, District Attorney Dan May said Dear could face other charges, but he did not elaborate.

Late Monday, the husband of Jennifer Markovsky, a woman who was killed in the assault, released a statement recalling how she read to their two children and helped them with their homework. "We will miss her; her cooking, crafting and adventurous spirit," Paul Markovsky wrote.

Police have declined to speculate on a motive for the attack. A law enforcement official said Dear told authorities, "no more baby parts" during a rambling statement after being arrested. The official spoke on

condition of anonymity because the official was not allowed to publicly discuss the ongoing investigation.

Planned Parenthood has said witnesses believe the gunman was motivated by his opposition to abortion. But Dear has been described by acquaintances as a reclusive loner who did not seem to have strong political or social opinions.

The Colorado district attorney said he has been in touch with U.S. Attorney John Walsh's office about the case. Walsh said investigators have been consulting with the Justice Department's civil rights and national security divisions, a move that suggests authorities could pursue federal charges in addition to state homicide ones. He did not elaborate.

One possible avenue could be the 1994 Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which makes it a crime to injure or intimidate clinic patients and employees.

Whatever authorities decide about

motive is sure to be controversial, given the political murkiness of Dear's statements and the debate over Planned Parenthood, which was reignited in July when anti-abortion activists released undercover video they said showed the group's personnel negotiating the sale of fetal organs.

A Republican congressional leader on Monday defended a House investigation of Planned Parenthood's provision of fetal tissue to researchers.

But House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, also indicated that the GOP-run Congress will not risk a government shutdown fight with President Barack Obama over GOP efforts to halt federal funding for the organization.

McCarthy contested suggestions by Planned Parenthood defenders that harsh language from the organization's critics has helped create a hostile political environment.



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