

# Animal rescuer weighed jail against saving dogs

By PHIL WRIGHT

Staff Writer

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 could not be reached for comment. 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 fa-

ther.

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.

# City asks for follow-up survey responses

By JADE McDOWELL

Staff Writer

A community activity center and indoor aquatic center are residents' top priorities for increasing Hermiston's livability, according to the results of a city survey.

Now the city wants to hear another round of feedback on those and three other top priorities before deciding which amenities should be the highest funding priority in the next 10 to 15 years.

Clark Worth of consulting firm Barney & Worth Inc., hired to conduct the surveys, said the new survey would specifically ask if people would be willing to contribute financially to any of the projects through higher taxes, donations or other means.

"What we find when we do these types of surveys is that some concepts may sound like they have a lot of community support, until

you specifically ask if people are willing to pay for it," Worth said in a statement. "This follow-up survey will help to determine what concepts truly are supported by the community to a level that a large-scale project may be viable."

More than 1,000 people took the original survey, which will help the Livable Hermiston committee compile a report for the city council to consider while developing a long-range plan and budgets for the next 10 to 15 years.

After being asked an open-ended question about what the city should do with a hypothetical gift of \$1 million, residents' top answer was building some sort of community center with activities for youth. Other top answers were an indoor aquatic center, cultural center offering space for musical per-

formances and art displays, revitalization of downtown and an expansion of the city's parks, trails and sports fields.

"A Community Activity Center, like a YMCA or a Boys & Girls Club, and a year-round aquatic center were by far the two most popular responses in the first survey," Worth said. "After that the concepts started to get a bit broader, but there were still several distinct themes that emerged to form the rest of the top five."

During the Livable Hermiston committee's Nov. 16 meeting Worth said Hermiston's top strengths seem to be its young population, welcoming small-town character and prime crossroads location.

The newest Livable Hermiston survey can be found online at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/HermistonCommunity](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HermistonCommunity).

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# Hermiston ag teacher wins award, attends national convention

A Hermiston agricultural educator recently attended a national convention as one of a select group of teachers nationwide wide who received a professional development scholarship.

Hermiston High School's Alyssa Davies received a 2015 Teachers Turn the Key scholarship and attended the National Association of Agricultural Educators annual convention Nov. 17-21 in New Orleans, according to a press release from the association.

The scholarship brings together agricultural educators with four or fewer years of experience and immerses them in three days of professional development that addresses issues specific to the early years of teaching agriculture. Participants also have the opportunity to become involved in NAAE leadership and network with other NAAE convention attendees. Recipients come away from the experience with a long-lasting peer cohort and tools that will help them have successful careers as agricultural educators.

Davies has been teaching agriculture at Hermiston High School for two years, where she serves more than 500 students. Hermiston's Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources program offers rigorous opportunities for these students, who are also all FFA members. Some of these include participation in the Columbia Basin Student Homebuilders Program, summer internships with local businesses and an annual Ag in the Classroom day where high school students teach agricultural lessons at six local elementary

schools.

"My instruction concentrates on providing opportunities where students use critical thinking skills and cooperative learning," Davies said in the release. "I challenge myself every day to keep learning new things in order to share with my students; my curriculum is continually developing and improving in order to meet the industry's changes."

In her two years at Hermiston, Davies and five of her students have been able to attend the National FFA Organization's Washington Leadership Conference. While there, Davies' students learned about the need for service in their local communities, and she was able to connect with advisors from all over the country through professional development.

In addition to attending professional development, each of the scholarship recipients was also recognized during a general session at the convention. RAM Trucks sponsors the scholarship program as a special project of the National FFA Foundation.

Headquartered in Lexington, Kentucky, NAAE is the professional organization in the United States for agricultural educators. It provides its nearly 8,000 members with professional networking and development opportunities, professional liability coverage and extensive awards and recognition programs. The mission of NAAE is "professionals providing agricultural education for the global community through visionary leadership, advocacy and service."

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