

FCAHS members offer their side of shelter death

Dogs left outside together in pen; group agrees more training needed

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"A perfect storm," said Gay Schwartz, a member of the Forrest City Area Humane Society, describing the events that led to the death of a dog at the animal shelter Sunday.

"You've got 14 dogs, nine females, five males. You've got two females in heat. And if you clean out the kennels you pretty well know if a dog is in heat. It's not rocket science. Some of the dogs are aggressive," said Schwartz. "They've been together outside for hours with little water."

"We don't know what set them off. One dog bumping another that could have started it," said Janie Hicks, FCAHS president.

Several members of the FCAHS agreed to talk about the incident, in which dogs were left outside together in a pen for hours, and a melee erupted. One dog died from being mauled.

Hicks said one thing she wanted to say was that earlier, when Humane Society members said they were instructed by their attorney not to speak to the media, it was because of concerns over a pending lawsuit between the group and the City of Forrest City. She said their attorney had since told them that speaking to the media was okay, as long as they did not get into the lawsuit.

An animal control officer had let the dogs out into the pen earlier in the day on Sunday.

Alyssa Aldridge, one of the adoption coordinators for the FCAHS, said she was asked by Schwartz to go by the shelter and see if they were still out. She said she got there about 9:45 p.m.

"I told her I would swing by there," said Aldridge. "I saw the dogs were still outside."

She said she called Schwartz

and was told not to go into the shelter by herself.

At around 9:54 p.m., she said she had to get out of the car, because the dogs were fighting.

"They had one Lab called Bozo and were dragging him around," she said. "I was running around beating on the fence trying to get them off of him. And this man drove by — he told me at first he thought I was trying to break in. He shot a gun in the air to make them get off the dog. All the dogs scattered."

Schwartz arrived, and so did the police.

"They were there very quickly," Schwartz said.

Attempts to find a vet were unsuccessful on a holiday weekend.

More volunteers arrived to try taking care of the injured dogs. It looked like some of the dogs were going into shock, and Hicks said she wanted to warm some towels in the dryer. "I opened the dryer and I found a pair of jeans and a shirt."

When animal control arrived, they got food and supplies, including bleach, out of a locked jeep on the premises.

Bozo, the Lab who was severely injured, died later the next morning.

Mayor Gordon McCoy was quoted in the *Times-Herald* on Wednesday as saying animal control should have known when dogs were in heat.

"Yes, they definitely need more training," she said. "We've been having problems like this for a year and a half now, and unfortunately it takes something like this for it to be realized that, 'Oh, maybe we need more training?' That's an understatement. Yes, they need more training."

Mary Clark, one of the volunteers who assisted with the cleanup afterwards, said, "People

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either love animals and care for them, or they don't. There are people out there who just don't care for animals. And it doesn't matter if you have training or not...Do you have to train somebody to have compassion for animals?"

Hicks said, "There are situations out there when sure, I'd like to give them some advice. When you do this they think we're trying to tell them how to do their job."

There is also some disagreement between animal control and the FCAHS over who is responsible for taking the dogs in.

"The mayor indicated that there is some kind of policy to the effect that they (animal control) let the dogs out in the morning and we're supposed to go back and let them in, in the afternoon," said Hicks. "I have no clue what he's talking about."

Aldridge said that when Humane Society members let the dogs into the pen, they stay there as long as the animals are out.

"We don't leave the premises for eight or 10 hours. And we group the dogs according to their behavior," said Aldridge.

McCoy said he is investigating, and members of the FCAHS have given statements to police.