

## Family's pit bull attacks 3-year-old

BY RAY GRONBERG, The Herald-Sun

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DURHAM -- A 3-year-old girl is recovering from injuries she suffered Tuesday morning when a pit bull that belonged to her family attacked her in the yard of her East Trinity Avenue home.

Authorities said a neighbor, Jamie Gunter, pulled Jaida Riviera away from the dog and summoned help. Riviera's family surrendered the dog to Durham County Animal Control, which euthanized it and is testing the remains for rabies.

Officials don't know if the dog had been vaccinated. "We have no record of it," Animal Control Director Cindy Bailey said, adding that that fact, combined with the extent of the girl's injuries, prompted her staff to kill the 65-pound animal rather than put it in quarantine for observation.

Jaida suffered bites to her head and upper torso, Bailey said.

Durham police said the attack began about 10:45 a.m., shortly after Jaida took a puppy out into the yard. She was home with her mother and another child who Bailey said was 5 years old.

The pit bull was chained in the yard. Authorities aren't sure what triggered the attack, but it is clear that it continued for some minutes because Jaida got tangled in the dog's chain.

Gunter, who lives on the same block, was walking to his truck to retrieve some papers when he noticed the older child screaming and yelling, and saw that the pit bull was attacking something.

Looking closer, he saw that the victim was a small child. He moved in and kicked the dog in hopes of convincing it to break off the attack. When that didn't work, he armed himself with a wooden post and hit the animal with it twice. That made the dog back away. It sat barking as Gunter freed Jaida from the chain and spirited the little girl away.

"It looked like [the attack had] been going on a couple minutes," Gunter said. "She was wrapped up five to seven times with the chain, and she was bloody plus dirty. She was just lucky she was lying on her face to where he couldn't get to her throat."

Gunter said he took Jaida into her family's house, put her on a couch and called 911. The girl's mother apparently learned of the attack when Gunter brought Jaida inside, and was quite upset.

The dog had not previously been a problem, Gunter added.

"The kids wave at me and I wave at them. They play out there all the time," he said. "I don't understand what happened this time. It's really strange."

Jaida's injuries aren't considered life-threatening. As of Tuesday afternoon, she was in stable condition at Duke University Hospital, Durham Police Department spokeswoman Kammie Michael said.

Michael added that as of Tuesday, police hadn't filed any charges in the case.

Tuesday's attack did draw notice from a local advocacy group that's been lobbying officials in Durham and Orange counties to bar dog owners from leaving their dogs chained outside. Supporters of the ban say chaining makes dogs more prone to bark and bite.

"Chaining dogs makes them aggressive and clearly a danger to any child who crosses their path," said Amanda Arrington, a Durham resident and spokeswoman for the Coalition to Unchain Dogs.

County officials have been pondering the request, but haven't been in a hurry to move legislation through channels. Their main worry is that a new law would be difficult to enforce.

"My personal feeling is it's a good thing, but it's going to take a lot of planning to make it happen and a lot of enforcement from Animal Control," County Commissioner Becky Heron said earlier this year. "And they don't have the persons on staff to do that."

Bailey said an incident like Tuesday's makes "a very strong argument" for an anti-chaining law, though there are also strong arguments on the other side and "a lot of reality factors to the issue."

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