

Girl survives attack by two pit bulls

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An 8-year-old girl was recovering at home Monday after she was attacked by two pit bulls while she played with friends in a Waukegan park near her home.

Waukegan police said Sierra Riley received 50 stitches to the right side of her face, along with a puncture wound on the back of her head and superficial bites around her abdomen. An unidentified woman saved Sierra from further attack about 2 p.m. Sunday.

Lake County prosecutors charged the dogs' owner, Joseph Hernandez, 35, with misdemeanor reckless conduct. Hernandez, of the 600 block of George Street in Waukegan, also was cited with city ordinance violations.

As Sierra rested at home Monday, her mother, Mindy Riley, said the family has no intention of departing with its nearly 1-year-old pit bull, Pinky.

"She's fine with it. She's not scared," said Riley, referring to her daughter.

Sunday's attack in Waukegan came nearly a year since a trio of pit bulls severely injured two children in the Cary area. That incident sparked debate about pit bulls across the suburbs.

Waukegan police Cmdr. Mark Stevenson said the 60- to 70-pound male pit bulls, Yankee and Duke, forced open a basement window and escaped from Hernandez's home to Roosevelt Park, near McAlister Street and Belvidere Road.

Stevenson said Sierra was playing with friends in the park when the 11/2-year-old pit bulls approached her. He said the dogs jumped Sierra after she panicked and screamed.

After the unidentified woman pulled Sierra away from the dogs, authorities were summoned and witnesses directed them to the park's southwest area along a ravine. Officers who were looking for the dogs then heard growling behind them while in a yard on nearby George Street.

Stevenson said Yankee was shot as he and the other dog charged toward police. Both dogs went back to Hernandez's home, where Yankee died and Duke was captured by Waukegan Animal Control.

Riley, 28, said Sierra was expected to visit a plastic surgeon today.

"She's doing a lot better," Riley said. "She's in a lot of pain."

Although Riley said Hernandez should have had his dogs on a leash, police said the man was upstairs and unaware the dogs bolted from his home.

"He wasn't just allowing his dogs to roam around the neighborhood freely," Stevenson said.

Police said they visited Hernandez's home on a complaint about barking by the two pit bulls last month. Stevenson said a warning was issued to Hernandez, with authorities suggesting he keep the dogs inside instead of tied up in a back yard.