

# Dog's mauling stirs owner

## Laws too lax, she says, after pit bull bursts into home

By Jeff Long  
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Upset and worried after a pit bull mauled her black Labrador retriever, a Crystal Lake woman said Thursday that she wants to push for stronger laws to protect people and pets from dangerous dogs.

Cristina Orton was putting away groceries Tuesday evening when a neighbor's pit bull charged through a patio screen and attacked her dog, Sammy. The Lab wound up with 22 staples in its head and dozens of stitches, Orton said.

A McHenry County official said designating dogs as "vicious" and eligible for destruction has become more difficult since the legislature made judges, rather than animal-control officers, the ones who decide whether to put a dog down.

That angers Orton, who said officials should do more to get dangerous dogs off the streets.

The pit bull, Shady, was put down by owners Patti and David Wuich on Wednesday. They were fined \$50 for allowing a dog to run loose, said Pat McNulty, administrator of the county Department of Public Health.

Shady would have been designated dangerous by McHenry County Animal Control if the dog weren't put down, McNulty said. Under state law, the dog would not have been labeled vicious until it was involved in two more attacks.

A vicious designation would have allowed a judge to order Shady put to death, McNulty said. Or the judge could have ordered the owners to keep the dog penned and pay a yearly \$200 registration fee.

No dogs have been labeled vicious in McHenry County since the legislature gave that authority in 2004 to judges, McNulty said. Before that, animal control officials made the determination, he said.

In 2002 six dogs were designated vicious, compared with three in 2003, McNulty said.

"The number of calls [about dog attacks] didn't change," McNulty said. "But the level of proof did. ... It's more difficult" to put them down.

The three-strikes allowance for dogs that attack other dogs confounds Orton, who described several minutes of chaos in her kitchen Tuesday evening. The incident began about 7:30 p.m., when Orton and her fiance returned from shopping.

"The next thing I know, the pit bull, at full-force speed, came ripping through my door," she said. "My dog never had a chance to fight back."

A relative of the pit bull's owners said the Lab was barking and attracted the pit bull, but Orton denied that Thursday.

Orton tried to jump between the dogs when the pit bull broke through the screen and leapt for her dog. Orton, who was scratched but had no serious injuries, said she just reacted.

"I put my hands in the pit bull's mouth at one point, trying to pry him away," she said. "The first thing I could grab was a TV tray, and I began hitting him with it. The dog did not even flinch. He was tearing Sammy around like a rag doll."

Sammy must wear a cone to keep from scratching the wounds. The pit bull's owners paid a \$450 vet bill, she said.

"He's an emotional wreck," she said of Sammy. "He won't even walk in the kitchen."

She vowed to contact legislators to see about strengthening laws. She said she also wants to start an advocacy group.

Although pit bulls often have been in the news for attacks on other animals and people, any dog that shows aggressiveness should be kept away from others, she said.

"There's people that have been attacked and they don't know what to do," she said.

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