

Pit bulls can be aggressive, but get bad rap, owner says

Jim Fehring said he has to worry about his 15-pound miniature pinscher biting someone more than he has to worry about his 75-pound pit bull.

No one's afraid of Jack the pinscher, he said, but people are terrified of Luvs the pit bull, named for her personality.

Fehring, of West Chester Twp., estimates he's owned or rescued about 50 dogs in his lifetime, including many pit bulls.

"Pit bulls are by far the most loving dog I've ever experienced," he said. "They form incredible bonds."

But because they're one of the most abused breeds out there, Fehring said pit bulls can develop or inherit behavioral problems. They can grow to be nervous, scared and aggressive.

"That doesn't happen unless people do it to them," he said. "If left to their own devices, they're incredibly friendly and gentle."

Pit bulls originally were bred for fighting other dogs and are extremely strong, easy to train and have a high tolerance for pain, said Butler County Dog Warden Julie Holmes.

"They are very determined when it comes to doing what they're asked," she said.

Pit bulls have reportedly become more popular in the last few years. The trend has been apparent for several years at the Animal Friends Humane Society in Trenton, said Director Meg Stephenson. The animal shelter is one of the few around that rehabilitates and adopts out pit bulls, which are constantly being housed at the shelter, Stephenson said.

"It's astounding," said Holmes, the dog warden. "Everybody and their brother started breeding them, trying to get \$500 by selling them (papers or not) to their buddies."

That, combined with a few unethical owners who mistreat their animals, has led to a proliferation of pit bulls in the community that have behavioral problems, she said.

Pit bull lovers will say their favorite breed gets a bad rap because of widespread publicity when the dogs attack humans.

But according to city health records, pit bulls are responsible for the majority of dog bites in the last eight years in the city of Hamilton.

Since 2001, dozens of breeds caused 846 dog bites reported to the city's health department. Of those, 157 were attributable to pit bulls and pit bull mixes; 133 were from general mixed breeds; and Labradors and Lab mixes came in third, with 65 incidents.

Recently, a 5-year-old girl suffered multiple wounds after she was mauled by her father's pit bull, which had been let out of its cage. The dog, characterized by Holmes as friendly and well-behaved, was euthanized by lethal injection.

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The girl's father, who was not home at the time of the incident, was charged with failing to confine the dog and has been asked to produce proof of liability insurance, as required by state law of people who own "vicious dogs."

There have been reports of other recent pit bull attacks:

A 9-year-old girl in Lindenwald was mauled, reportedly by a pit bull, on June 25, when she walked into her friend's home with her friend. The girl received 30 stitches to close wounds on her face.

A 10-year-old girl was bitten on the leg by a pit bull when she entered the fenced-in backyard of a neighbor in recent months on Meadow Drive in Hamilton. The wound required stitches and likely will leave a scar.

Contact this reporter at (513) 820-2122 or rwilson@coxohio.com.

Pit bull facts

Number of pit bulls housed at the Animal Friends Humane Society in Trenton

2007: 378

2008: 391

2009 to date: 219

So far this year, 29 notifications of violations, five involving multiple pit bulls, have been sent out in response to complaints and first-time offenders

Source: Butler County Dog Warden Julie Holmes

Top 10 dangerous breeds in the Hamilton

2001 to present: 846 dog bites, 78 different dog breeds

Pit bulls: 157

Mixed: 133

Labradors: 65

German shepherds: 61

Chows: 49

Rottweilers and boxers: 37 each

Beagles: 24

Shepherds: 17

Chihuahuas and terrier mixes: 16 each

Poodles: 14

*Stats include mixed pure breeds.

Source: Hamilton Health Department

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Mike, what do you suppose the "intent" was of the health department? Are they part of the big conspiracy to make pit bulls look bad? And how do you know the mixed breeds listed are not pit bulls? It is common practice for owners to claim a pit or pit mix is a "boxer mix" or "lab mix" or "terrier mix" to avoid insurance restrictions and liability.