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Pit Bull Mauls Boy, 5, in Highland City Attack

Martin Collier requires more than 250 sutures on his scalp and lip.

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The Ledger

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HIGHLAND CITY - A 5-year-old boy is recovering after a family friend's pit bull mauled him Tuesday afternoon, the Polk Sheriff's Office said.

Martin Collier was a guest at the home of Scott Gawtrely, of 4619 Great Blue Heron Drive in Highland City, about 3:30 p.m. when the attack happened.

Gawtrely's pit bull bit Martin on the head, face, arm and legs, according to the Sheriff's Office. Martin was flown to St. Joseph's Children's Hospital in Tampa by helicopter and needed more than 50 sutures in his scalp, a 3-inch piece of which was missing, and more than 200 sutures on his top lip.

Martin suffered three or four punctures on his left forearm, between 13 and 15 punctures on his left leg and two punctures on his right leg. Despite his extensive injuries, doctors expected to release Martin on Tuesday night.

His family declined comment through the Sheriff's Office.

Gawtrely surrendered the pit bull that attacked Martin to Sheriff's Office Animal Control officers, Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Carrie Rodgers said. The 5-year-old dog is being kept in quarantine while the attack is investigated.

Neighbor Michael Dodge, 27, said Gawtrely and his wife have lived in the dark beige corner home since August and kept two pit bulls.



DAVID MILLS/The Ledger

Dozer, a 5-year-old male pit bull at Polk County Sheriff's Office Animal Services in Winter Haven. Dozer is accused of attacking 5-year-old Martin Collier at the home of Scott Gawtrely in Highland City Tuesday afternoon. A 3 inch piece of scalp was torn from Collier.

He would see the couple walking the dogs shortly after they moved in, but after erecting a privacy fence around their backyard, they stopped.

"Even (next-door neighbors) said they forgot they had them," he said.

From what little he saw of them, Dodge said the dogs seemed friendly, and they were quiet.

Another neighboring couple walking their three dogs Tuesday night said they spoke with the Gawtreys after the attack and Scott Gawtreys told them he's raised the pit bull that attacked Martin since it was a puppy. However, after Tuesday's events, he turned over both of his dogs to Animal Control out of fear that they may become violent again, next time against his own child, the couple said, declining to give their names.

Nobody answered the door on two separate visits to the Gawtreys home Tuesday evening.

The last incident involving pit bulls in Polk happened in January 2005, when a pair of dogs attacked 10-year-old Jesus Arriaga as he walked to school in Lakeland. Arriaga suffered minor injuries.

Pit bulls have been in the news recently, with owners accused of breeding the dogs to fight. Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick was suspended from training with his team after he was indicted on charges related to dogfighting. He is accused of training and fighting dozens of pit bulls seized from his home in April.

In Polk County, Lewis Barrentine, 55, was charged in September with breeding and training roosters and 32 pit bulls to fight on his property in the Green Swamp area.

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