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PRESS RELEASE : MANSLAUGHTER INDICTMENT SOUGHT IN PIT BULL FATALITY

Sheriff Howard Smith and Commonwealth's Attorney William Neely announced today that investigators have turned up new evidence in the Dorothy Sullivan slaying investigation, which has convinced them to seek indictments on 3/21/05 against Deanna H. Large, 36, of Spotsylvania, the owner of the 3 pit bulls dogs which killed Mrs. Sullivan on 3/8/05, for involuntary manslaughter in violation of Virginia Code 18.2-36, a felony punishable by 1-10 years imprisonment, and also for 3 counts of allowing dangerous dogs to run at large in violation of County Code 4-21, class one misdemeanors punishable by up to 12 months in jail and a fine of up to \$2500.

While no Virginia precedent can be found for such an involuntary manslaughter charge arising from a dog attack, C.A. Neely stated that, in his opinion, this case now clearly appears to meet the requirements for such a felony charge. Involuntary manslaughter is a common law crime, which consists of an accidental killing, contrary to the intention of the accused, but which is caused by either by some unlawful act (such as allowing dangerous dogs to run at large in violation of law) or by a lawful act committed with a reckless disregard for public safety (such as not keeping control of 3 pit bull dogs after warnings they were dangerous).

Sheriff's investigators and County animal wardens have worked hard in this investigation to uncover the new evidence, which will hopefully lead to these indictments. They continue their investigation, as forensic evidence is also being sought via the state veterinarian and also through the state crime lab.

Regardless of the outcome of this tragic case, both the Sheriff and the Commonwealth Attorney urge Virginia's legislators to strengthen Virginia's dangerous dog laws, to give localities better tools with which to protect the public from such dangerous animals.