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Court to decide fate of canines taken from Loomis home

By: Susan Belknap, Loomis News Editor

The fate of 11 dogs owned by a Loomis family will soon be determined by the Placer County courts.

The story began July 18 when according to one of the dog owners, Lubov Kuzmenko, animal control employees and sheriff's deputies came to their Loomis residence and seized all but one of the dogs that were living with the Kuzmenko family.

"The police had a search warrant and the animal control people had a video camera," said Lubov, who lives in the residence with her siblings, grandmother and parents, Nina and Michael Kuzmenko, who are immigrants from Estonia and speak limited English.

"They took all but one dog," Lubov said. "No one could catch him."

According to an affidavit signed by Placer County Animal Control, there were several complaints from people who had answered a newspaper ad in which the Kuzmenkos advertised some of the Chihuahuas and miniature pinscher dogs for sale.

The complaints centered on the care and condition of several of the dogs in the Kuzmenko home including one Chihuahua who had sustained a broken leg.

I was just petting the dog one day and it jumped and broke its leg, Lubov translated for her father, Michael.

"The Chihuahuas are very fragile dogs," Lubov said.

Another dog had swollen eyes, which Michael said was due to bee stings and a few had various sores. One of the miniature pinschers was reported to be mange with a number of balding spots and several dogs were infested with fleas.

Lubov said her mother, Nina, was told by a veterinarian in Auburn to put a cream on the animals, but it was not providing relief for all the dogs that were affected.

Lubov said her family has been breeding dogs for the last few years. She admitted that her family had a difficult time with the pinschers as they kept contracting ringworm each summer.

"We just want to breed the Chihuahuas, not the min-pins, they are too hard," Lubov translated for her mother. "But no one told us we had to have papers or a license to breed. We're new to this. They (animal control) didn't tell us how to care for the dogs."

According to Mike Winters, animal control manager for Placer County Department of Health and Human Services,



karina williams/the loomis news These three dogs are just a few of the animals that were seized from the Kuzmenko home in Loomis in mid July. They are being held at the Placer County Animal Shelter until an agreement can be made between the dogs' owners and the county.

an offer has been made to the Kuzmenkos to help them understand the proper care of the animals.

He said the reason the dogs were seized was in response to the various complaints from prospective buyers and because of a Loomis animal keeping ordinance, which states that only four dogs can be kept on a property that is situated on more than an acre. The Kuzmenkos reside on about 1-½ acres.

Ryan Wunsch, planning technician for the Town of Loomis, also said animal breeding is permissible as long as there are not more than four animals on the property.

Currently nine of the dogs are residing at the Placer County Animal Shelter in Auburn while two others are under the care of a Placer County veterinary clinic.

Both Winters and Wunsch said they are interested in resolving the situation but want to ensure the animals can be cared for properly.

"I would really like to work something out with them (Kuzmenkos)," Winters said.

Winters said the bill for the care the animals have been receiving has amounted to approximately \$6,000.

"Maybe they could come and get two of the dogs," Winters said. "But they would have to come up with some of the money before they can be released."

Lubov said her family is confused at the willingness of the county to give them some of the dogs back when they have admitted they don't know all they could about caring for the animals. The main reason the family got the dogs was to have as pets but they were also interested in making money by breeding them as well, according to Lubov.

"They say we are abusing the dogs but we did everything the doctor in Auburn told us to do," Lubov translated for her mother. "We just don't know what to do."

"If we pay the money and get the dogs back but still don't know how to care for them, they could still be taken away," Lubov said for her father. "We want to know the law and we want to take care of the dogs better."

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