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Thursday, Jan 10, 2008

Wally Spiers

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Woman to address ban of certain dogs at police assembly

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Ledy VanKavage continues to spread her message that banning breeds of dogs does not make a difference in public safety.



Submitted
 Ledy VanKavage with two of her three rescued brindle pitbulls, Clarence Darrow (left) and Che.

On Sunday she will speak at the Winter 2008 Training Conference on Police Ethics for the Illinois Chiefs of Police in Collinsville at the Gateway Center.

"I'm talking about breed specific legislation and whether or not canine profiling is effective," she said.

It is a topic she addresses frequently.

"I'll talk about how it doesn't work," she said.

VanKavage is an attorney and the senior director of legislation and legal training for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. She has a long history of activism in animal welfare matters and has founded and served on the boards of several organizations.

She lives in Collinsville and she practices what she preaches. She has rescued some pit bulls, a breed that many want banned because of viciousness. VanKavage has three rescued brindle pit bulls named Clarence Darrow, Che and Bella.

At the conference she will offer alternatives for police to help get dangerous dogs under control.

"There are dangerous dog laws in Illinois that a lot of police don't know about," she said. "Under Illinois law, it is very easy to get a dog declared dangerous. Not vicious. That's a much more involved procedure involving the court system."

VanKavage said dangerous dogs should be identified by behavior, not breed.

"I'm working on trying to get the police to focus on that," she said. "That is what I will be educating them about."

She said experience has shown that banning specific breeds doesn't change the number of dog bite incidents.

"Specific breed laws don't work," she said. "We've seen it in several different countries where they enacted breed restrictions. Even with the breeds restricted, their bite statistics don't change."

She offers her rescued pit bulls as an example of how a supposed dangerous breed can be handled. She said her cats dominate the much larger animals.

People used to go off trail to avoid the dogs when they were walked. But when the pit bulls have on some sort of costume, people come over and talk to them and are fascinated, she said.

"A lot of it is perception," she said.

At the conference, a pair of rescued pit bulls who are drug sniffing dogs for the Washington State Police also will perform a demonstration.

Wally Spiers' column runs five days a week. Have a column idea? Call Wally at 239-2506 or (800) 642-3878; or e-mail: wspiers@bnd.com

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