

# WDEF News 12

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## Pit Bull Lovers Unite (against South Pittsburg)

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This internet thing sure is changing news.

Here we have this story about an ordinance passed in little ol South Pittsburg, Tennessee.

But put it on the website, and suddenly dog lovers from all over are swamping us with messages about the evil of this ordinance ( a ban on Pit Bulls in the city limits).

If you are a local, you probably had no idea there were this many Pit Bull lovers in our area.

And there aren't.

The messages are coming from breeders and club members from all over the country (St. Louis & San Antonio are specifically mentioned).

They're loaded with cute pictures, links and even books on the subject.



It's a well organized response that shows you this is no isolated incident of lawmakers singling out Pit Bulls.

Their message is simple.

Pit Bulls don't deserve their fierce reputation.

I can save you some reading time and sum up the arguements with three main points.

1. The dogs aren't genetically mean. Bad people make them that way.
2. Banning a breed is an ineffective way to get dangerous dogs off the streets.
3. We in society in general, and we in the media in particular, unfairly play up the violent nature of

the dogs.

Here's may take on each of those points, as it applies to the ban in South Pittsburg. And, by way of disclosure, I have two dogs myself, one large, one small.. both streets mutts.

### **Genetics:**

Remember, we're talking dogs here, not humans. They really have been bred (sometimes for centuries) to maintain certain traits. There really are breed characteristics. I grew up with Bull Mastifs who were known for their fierce look, but mild disposition and low pain threshold (really handy around kids).

So were Pit Bulls bred to be fighters? Our posters have links to all kinds of sites, quoting scientific information, denying this. But I don't know, myself.

What I do know is that there are a lot of people out there who think Pits are naturally aggressive. So when they want an attack dog, this is the one they get. They then proceed to raise it mean and treat it mean. So breeding or not, it grows up mean.

So, myth or not, the reality is there are a lot of fierce Pit Bulls out there, because their owners want them that way.

And don't underestimate the influence of dog fighting on our public perception. The breed is the dog of choice in those circles. So next time someone says dog fighting isn't such a big deal, remember the role they have in giving dog-owners a breed they can train to bite you!

But the Pit Bull supporters sent us plenty of pictures to show a different side of the breed, as a loving-family dog. They say punish the owners who raise mean dogs, not the breed itself.

### **Breed Bans Don't Work:**

In South Pittsburg's defense, it's very hard to deal with dangerous dogs. They have a leash law, but those are tough to enforce without a major investment in animal control officers. Banning the breed is just simpler, to them.

To put it into context for our out of town posters, this ordinance grandfathers in any existing dogs. And no pit bulls will be destroyed in the making of this law. Still, it will be hard to take if you are committed to the breed as a family pet and want puppies.

But will the ban really improve anything? To enforce it, you're going to have to define just what is a pit bull. Does the law apply to a mix breed? If you can't keep a dog on a leash, how are you going to prove who owns it?

And just think about the precedent this sets. You want to end a type of behavior, so you just ban anything that looks like it. Clearly, that's a solution that has lawyers all over the country licking their chops.

### **Public Image:**

Clearly, there are people out there who are scared of death of dogs. And I guarantee to you, to those people, the Pit Bull is the most ferocious dog of all. And we have to take a lot of the credit for that.

As our posters point out, dog maulings still are quite rare. And we are quick to identify the culprit as a Pit Bull, since we are pre-dispositioned to believe it (even when the offender may be just a mix breed, street dog).

Still, Pit Bulls have killed. And don't give me those comments about smaller breeds actually bite more. They don't kill. The real question is whether the breed is a greater risk to kill someone? The public thinks so. But to my knowledge, there is no scientific or statistical study to back that up.

### **CONCLUSION:**

So in my mind, I understand why city fathers took this action. But I really don't like it. Of all the arguments from the Pit Bull crowd, the one that strikes home to me is the practicality of it. I don't think it will do any better job of protecting the citizens. And as an American, I downright resent the government punishing me and my dog for something we haven't done. I would fight the idea that a politician could tell me what kind of dog I can have.

However, despite all the protests on our website, it doesn't seem to have stirred up much dust in Marion County. We called the city manager and they say they haven't gotten many complaints at all.

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