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UPDATE: Dogs from Forks shelter counted, safe and being examined

By Paul Gottlieb
Peninsula Daily News



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Callie, one of 124 dogs that Forks resident Steve Markwell transported earlier this week to a dog sanctuary near the Arizona-Nevada border, sits inside a newly erected kennel. — Guardians of Rescue

FORKS — Steve Markwell and all of the 124 dogs from the Olympic Animal Sanctuary in Forks arrived intact Tuesday afternoon at an unidentified private dog sanctuary in the area of the Arizona-Nevada border, an animal rescue group spokesman said Wednesday.

Markwell, who did not return calls for comment Wednesday, left Saturday from his Forks-based sanctuary, piloting a 53-foot tractor-trailer loaded with the crated animals.

"They all arrived safely," said Robert Misseri, president of Smithtown, N.Y.-based Guardians of Rescue, which is organizing the rescue and eventual distribution of the dogs to animal welfare groups capable of managing the animals.

"We fully expect this to take many, many months," Misseri said.

Guardians of Rescue has temporary physical control of the animals and expects to take permanent control by Friday, Misseri said.

The dogs, many of which are considered violent and unadoptable to families, had been housed at Markwell's 4,000-square-foot warehouse at 1021 Russell Road, where protesters had gathered daily for weeks to protest what they said were the sanctuary's inhumane conditions.

Photos depicting dogs living in travel crates purported to have been taken inside by former volunteers and Forks police have been at the center of a nationwide Facebook campaign to shut it down for more than a year.

Markwell has denied mistreating the animals.

Misseri said Markwell insisted as a condition for working with Guardians of Rescue that the location of the private sanctuary not be made public until Markwell leaves.

"He is fearing for his life," Misseri said. "He told me his life was threatened."

"My concern is that if the location gets out before he leaves, he may leave with many of the dogs."

Misseri added that Markwell is "holding up."

Each animal will go through an intensive intake process so the organization can determine their physical and behavioral condition, Misseri said.

Intake will include an examination of records that Markwell brought with him.

It also will include a review of each dog's history and its temperament, and an examination by a behaviorist who will arrive on the property Friday.

Misseri did not know when the evaluations will be completed, but said they would last at least until Monday.

"We need to be accurate on the history of each dog and its temperament, and all the other pedigree that belongs with the dog so the receiving organizations know exactly what they are getting," he said.

"Mr. Markwell is the only one who can truly help with that."

Many of the dogs were being placed in fenced, group-kennel enclosures Wednesday outside their new, temporary home, which lacked room for more dogs inside its covered facility, Misseri said.

But other dogs that may be inclined to, and which were capable of, ripping through the fencing were being kept in 4-foot-by-4-foot ventilated crates until sturdier enclosures are built or acquired.

Building sturdy enclosures for the more aggressive dogs — the number could not be determined Wednesday — could cost Guardians of Rescue another \$30,000.

The group has already spent \$5,000 preparing for the dogs' arrival.

"It's a big endeavor, and I'm not sure how we'll fund it," Misseri said.

Those who want to donate can call 928-704-5760 to help pay for stronger kennels.

All the dogs are being adequately walked and fed, but the situation was "chaotic" given the inadequate enclosures and the need to rotate the dogs' locations, Misseri said.

In his 10 years of working on animal welfare issues, Misseri has seen about a dozen dog sanctuaries, but Olympic Animal Sanctuary stands out.

"Chances are a dog is at a sanctuary because all resources are exhausted," Misseri said.

"This is the last place a dog can live out its life, generally.

"Sanctuaries with 124 dogs with serious issues like the ones purported here, not so much.

"That is a very large amount."

Forks appears to be returning to some sense of normalcy after being targeted nationwide by animal rights advocates.

After picketing and protesting outside Markwell's warehouse since Dec. 2, protesters were gone Tuesday for the first time in several days, Forks Police Administrator Rick Bart said Wednesday.

"I don't think Mr. Markwell did the city of Forks any good at all," Bart said.

He also criticized protesters who claimed the city should have done more about Olympic Animal Sanctuary and was upset that some had called for boycotting Forks businesses.

City officials have said Markwell was doing nothing illegal.

"We are very happy Mr. Markwell is teaming up with Guardians of Rescue," Seattle-area animal welfare advocate Maggie McDowell said Wednesday, adding she opposed any boycotts.

Her last day in Forks was Thursday, five days after Markwell departed on a more than 1,000-mile odyssey that will end with him saying goodbye to the dogs he says he loves.

"We are hoping these dogs get the care they need," McDowell said.

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Last modified: December 26, 2013 6:54AM

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04:45PM

First Federal Sequim branches are now selling tickets for the 2015 Sequim Irrigation Festival Kick-Off Dinner....



Sequim Black Bear Diner

03:59PM

Our dinner special tonight is a Ham Dinner topped with Cinnamon Apples, two sides, and soup or salad for only...



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