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The Journal News

Sunday



NORAD'S HIDDEN BUNKER IS SHELTER OF LAST RESORT **PAGE 1B**

1,200 BITES

Health records show hundreds of attacks by bats, cats, dogs



1,061

Reported animal bites in
Westchester County, 2014

213

Reported animal bites in
Rockland County, 2014

456

Reported animal
exposures, including bites
and scratches, in Putnam
County, 2014

Yonkers Animal Shelter manager Almira Simpson with Monster, a dog with four bite incidents.

CARUCHA L. MEUSE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

ERNIE GARCIA ELGARCIA@LOHUD.COM

Steven Leong was a letter carrier for less than two years before Murdoch, a terrier mix, bit him on the wrist last year in Pearl River. Leong was delivering mail one afternoon on a dead-end residential block of North William Street and wasn't even on the property where Murdoch lived when it attacked. "A lot of people are careless. They just let their dogs run around unleashed and anyone in the vicinity pays the price," said Leong, 34, who needed a tetanus shot. Leong was one of 213 people bitten by an animal in Rockland County last year, according to county Health Department records obtained by The Journal News through a Freedom of Information Law request.

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More online

Questions? Reporter Ernie Garcia, with health and animal officials, will take your questions in an online chat at noon Monday on lohud.com's Facebook page. Search a database on animal bites at <http://data.lohud.com/charts/animalbites/>.

In Westchester County, 1,061 people were bitten by animals in 2014. Putnam County logged 456 animal exposures, which include bites, scratches or risky contact with saliva.

County health departments track animal bites and exposures to limit the spread of rabies. Dogs were the biggest culprits in Rockland and Westchester last year while, in Putnam, there were more exposures to bats than dogs. Other animals that bit or scratched humans in significant numbers were cats, followed by raccoons, foxes and skunks.

The records showed many pet owners, their relatives or guests are often bite victims. Exposure to or bites from wild animals are relatively rare, with the exception of bats in Putnam and Westchester.

Strays can also be a threat, the records show.

Nina Decker likes cats so, when a stray appeared at her Stony Point home last year, she decided to pet it. It bit her arm.

"It was a Sunday and I went to church and everything was fine," Decker said. "Then I noticed late in the day a red line up to my elbow so I went to the doctor the next day."

Decker received antibiotics for her wound. Depending on a bite's severity, treatments can include stitches, surgery or tetanus and anti-rabies injections.

Injuries vary

Others had worse injuries than Decker's.

The pit bull that attacked New Rochelle resident Tiara Parchment on Sept. 19 bit her seven times in the thigh. Parchment, who was 14, went to an emergency room where she received antibiotics.

The attack left puncture marks, scarring and she needed physical therapy for pulled muscles from her fall during the attack, according to Deborah Eddy, Parchment's attorney.

"At least two other tenants in this building were bitten by this dog before my client," said Eddy, who filed a lawsuit on Jan. 5 against Medina and Parchment's landlord, Platzner International Group and Lyncor Realty.

The owner, Francisco Medina, surrendered it Dec. 24 to the New Rochelle Humane Society, which serves as the city's dog pound.

The Humane Society euthanized the dog at Medina's request. Shelter operators don't like killing animals, but some can't be rehabilitated, said Dana Rocco, the shelter manager.

"They're not safe to put back out in the community because they're likely to injure another person or another dog," Rocco said.

Medina could not be reached for comment for this report. Neither Platzner nor its attorney, Gregory Katz, responded to requests for comment. In Katz's March 4 response to Parchment's lawsuit, he denied his client had any knowledge of the dog's biting history.

On May 29, the Yonkers Animal Shelter housed Monster and Rocky, two pit bull mixes that bit their owners or family members. Monster was euthanized June 2 for biting multiple people on four occasions, and Rocky was put down that day for biting a 12-year-old girl.

Pit bulls aren't inherently mean, said Courtney Farquhar, the shelter director at Adopt A Dog in Armonk, which on Thursday had nine pit bulls available for adoption. Their disposition is often a question of training, which was the case when the shelter recently accepted seven pit bull puppies.

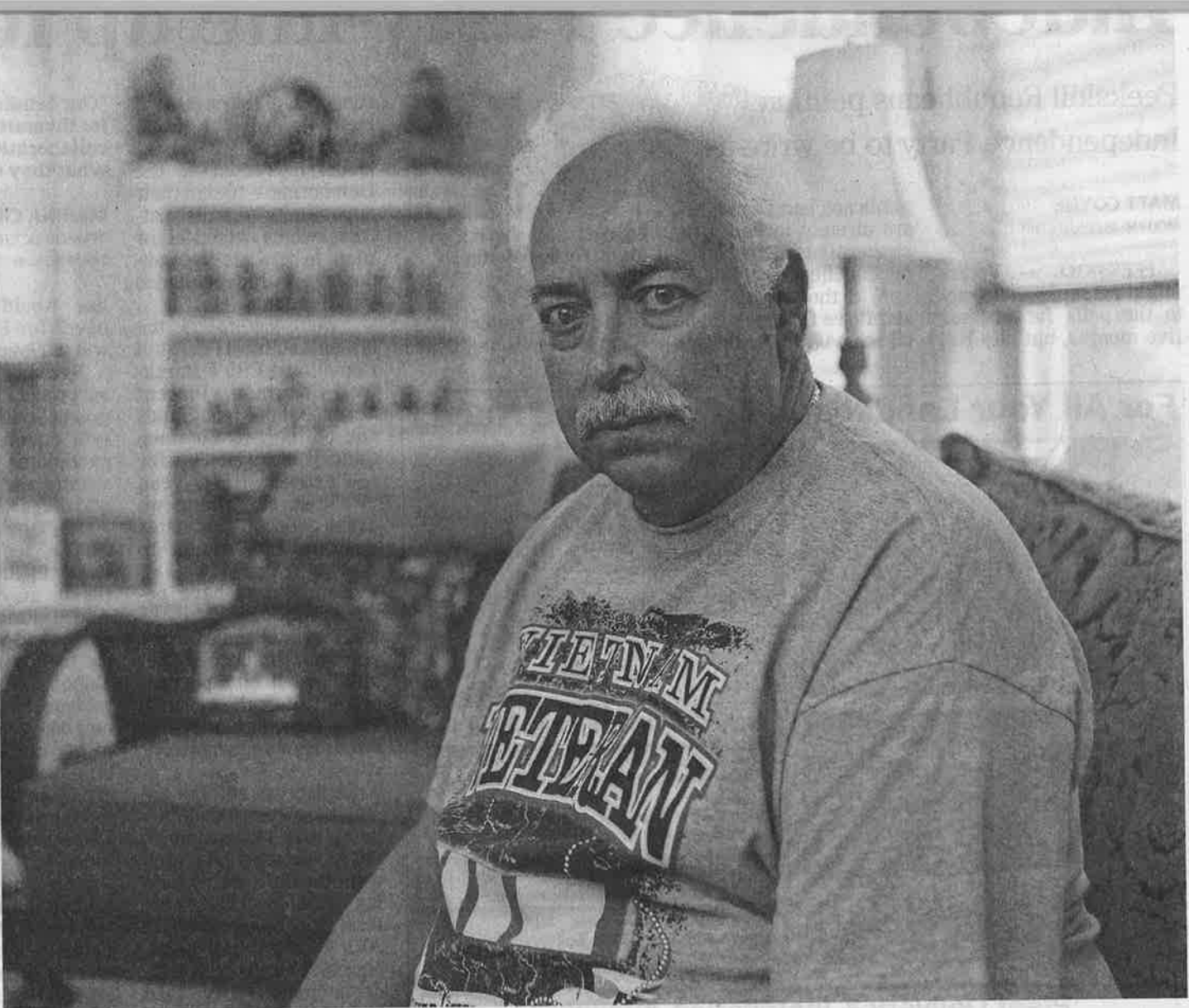
"We were able to give them training and socialization," Farquhar said. "They turned into these amazing pets."

Tracking bites

All animal bites are required by law to be reported to a county health officer. Even if the bite or scratch isn't serious enough to warrant medical attention, the victim or the victim's guardian should call the local county health department to report the incident.

State law requires counties to ensure a biting animal has its vaccinations and is quarantined for 10 days after the bite to determine if it remains alive and healthy. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, a rabid animal usually dies within seven days after becoming contagious.

If the biter is a stray or wild animal and can't be located or quarantined,



John Paul Ferrara, a retired letter carrier for more than 40 years and a former president of the Mount Vernon letter carriers' union, was attacked by dogs twice when he was working.

Rabies shots

Rabies shots for pets are required every three years. The first shot for puppies or kittens should be a one-year shot at three or four months. At 13 or 14 months, a pet should get the stronger three-year shot.

» Putnam County residents can get free rabies shots for cats, dogs and ferrets from 10 a.m. to noon July 25 at the Hubbard Lodge, 2880 Route 9, Cold Spring. Bring a photo ID and proof of prior rabies vaccination.

» Rockland County residents can get free rabies shots for cats, dogs and ferrets from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. July 12 at the county Fire Training Center in Ramapo. Call 845-364-2656 or visit http://rocklandgov.com/files/2914/1754/4932/2015_Clinic_Schedule.pdf for more information.

» Westchester County residents can get free rabies shots for cats, dogs and ferrets from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Aug. 22 at the SPCA, 590 N. State Road, Briarcliff Manor. Call 914-941-2896, ext. 10, for an appointment.

What to do

Anyone bitten or scratched by an animal should do the following:

- 1. Immediately wash the wound vigorously with soap and water and seek medical attention.
- 2. If the biting animal is a stray or wild animal, call your local police or animal control department.
- 3. All animal bites are required by law to be reported to a county health officer. If the bite or scratch isn't serious enough to warrant medical attention, the victim or the victim's guardian should call the local county health department to report the incident.

» Putnam County Health Department: 845-808-1390.

» Rockland County Health Department: 845-364-2656, or after hours, call 845-364-8600.

» Westchester County Health Department: 914-813-5000.

"These are very important, emotional cases for both sides and I think that more attention should be paid. We don't need more laws, we just need better ones"

JONATHAN G. SCHOPF
LAWYER WHO REPRESENTS DOG OWNERS

county health officials assess a person's wounds and determine a treatment. Often that means a course of anti-rabies shots.

If a wild animal bites a pet, county officials ensure the pet gets a rabies booster shot. If the pet isn't vaccinated at the time it is bitten by a wild animal and the animal isn't available for testing, health officials require the owner to do a six-month quarantine of the pet with unannounced visits by inspectors.

Under New York's Dangerous Dog Law, the public or town officials can take

legal action in a municipal court against a vicious dog. Paul Schofield, Clarkstown's deputy town attorney, said it takes a cooperating witness to testify in a dangerous dog case.

Once a complaint is filed in a municipal court, a judge can order officials to seize the dog and hold it until a hearing is held. The law states complainants are expected to have "clear and convincing evidence" of a dog's vicious propensity.

If a judge is satisfied with the evidence, the court can order — at the owner's expense — neutering, spaying, mi-

crochipping, training, fencing, muzzling, extra liability insurance or euthanasia.

Local health officials said a serial biter attracts their attention.

"We are vigilant with keeping an eye on what we're getting at the Health Department and letting authorities know if it's a chronic offender," said Peter DeLucia, Westchester County's assistant commissioner of health.

Lingering questions

Lorenzo Manaay, 46, was bitten by a neighbor's pit bull while he was visiting his cousin in Orangeburg in March last year. He said the bite on his thigh wasn't severe and only required antibiotics, but he wasn't sure what kind of follow-up to expect from the authorities because he was new to the United States from the Philippines.

"The police came and they asked me questions," said Manaay, who lives in Wayne, N.J. "I thought there would be a second time around about the observation (period), but I never heard anything about that case any more."

Rick Price, Rockland County's rabies coordinator, said his office usually doesn't call victims unless an animal tests rabid.

John Paul Ferrara, a retired letter carrier for more than 40 years and a former president of the Mount Vernon letter carriers' union local, said he was attacked twice during his career, but the dogs didn't seriously injure him.

Ferrara said dog owners don't face many penalties if their pets bite someone, but he wasn't sure what punishments would be appropriate.

"Do we restrict your mail? Do we fine you? I don't know what would be going overboard," said Ferrara, 65.

Even if a court rules a dog is dangerous, the law only permits euthanasia if there is serious physical injury or death, said Jonathan G. Schopf, a Clifton Park attorney who typically represents dog owners in dangerous dog cases. As for repeat biters, Schopf said they face harsher penalties if they've had previous dangerous-dog hearings.

Schopf said the state's Dangerous Dog Law doesn't work well for defense attorneys like himself or for prosecutors because of what he described as vague definitions and different applications of the law across municipalities.

"These are very important, emotional cases for both sides and I think that more attention should be paid," Schopf said. "We don't need more laws, we just need better ones."

Twitter:
@ErnieJourno

Find a bat in your house? Here's what to do

ERNIE GARCIA
ELGARCIA@LOHUD.COM

Finding a bat in your house is cause for concern because they are a rabies risk, but it's not a reason to panic. The real problem is if you awaken in a room with a bat.

"You can possibly get bitten while you're asleep and not be aware that you were bitten," said Mike Luke, a Putnam County Health Department sanitarian.

The safest way to catch a bat is with a butterfly net, coffee can or jar, Luke said. Then, slide a piece of cardboard or plywood under the container. Do not open doors or windows to let it outdoors and don't smash its head because then it

can't be tested.

Immediately call the county health department, which will take the specimen and ship it to a state lab for rabies testing.

About 97 percent of bats tested for rabies at the state's rabies lab test negative, according to the state Health Department.

Precautionary bat-related rabies shots for people and pets are more likely given if the bat escapes and/or it is not available for testing.

If an exposed victim never had a rabies vaccine, he or she has to get four shots, one immediately and the others on the third, seventh and 14th days, plus a fifth shot of rabies immune globulin.

In 2014, bats were the leading animal exposure in Putnam County, with 174 incidents, according to the Health Department. Most exposures weren't bites, just bats found in homes, though 24 people still needed rabies shots.

In Westchester County, 120 people who were exposed to bats last year needed rabies shots, even though health authorities only verified five bat bites.

Rockland County recorded 53 bat exposures last year. None of the 46 bats tested had rabies, but seven people got rabies shots because the bats escaped or were unavailable for testing.

Twitter: @ErnieJourno



JOE LARESE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

The bat was being shipped to Albany to be tested for rabies.

By the Way

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Learn about animal bite numbers



JOE LARESE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

Michael Luke, Putnam County Health Department public health sanitarian, packages a bat that was captured and killed.

In 2014, 1,730 animal bites were reported in Westchester, Rockland and Putnam counties.

In Rockland and Westchester, most reported bites came from dogs. In Putnam, there were more encounters with bats.

County health departments keep track of these numbers in order to prevent the transmission of rabies.

Bats are also the main culprit for reported wild animal bites.

Visit lohud.nydatabases.com to see a map and more information about animal encounters in the Lower Hudson Valley.

Questions? Reporter Ernie Garcia, with health and animal officials, will take your questions in an online chat at noon today on lohud's Facebook page.

WEATHER » 2A

Today: Rain/Showers
HIGH: 76 LOW: 61
Tomorrow: T-storms
HIGH: 81 LOW: 64



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