

The Journal News

Rescued canines receive grooming

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Vincent DiSalvio/The Journal News

Kennel manager Bill Quinn grooms a collie at the Hi-Tor Animal Shelter in Ramapo. The collie was one of nearly two dozen neglected dogs removed Wednesday from Karola O'Connell's Spook Rock Road home in Wesley Hills and groomed yesterday at the shelter.

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Rescued dogs get cleanup at Hi-Tor

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Workers shave hair from abused dogs at animal-care center

James Walsh
The Journal News

RAMAPO — Workers labored yesterday to shave nearly two dozen dogs of their feces-encrusted hair after the animals were rescued from cages inside a Wesley Hills house.

There were concerns at the Hi-Tor Animal Care Center that two of the dogs might not survive. A veterinarian began evaluating the conditions of all of the animals yesterday afternoon.

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A couple of the animals — there were 21 Shetland sheepdogs, one collie and one Shiba Inu — were seen in runs, racing around in circles as if unaccustomed to the more spacious quarters.

"They're like in shock," Hi-Tor worker Iris Conques said. "They were in crates all of the time."

Inside the center, Conques and another worker, Marc

Bidon, shaved one of the 23 dogs taken from the home of Karola O'Connell, 73, once a breeder of champion Shelties.

The dog stood in a raised bathtub as its matted hair was removed.

"It could be a senior," Bidon said in reference to the dog's age.

"Eight or 9 years old," said Denny Hirsch, the coordinator of the Mid-Hudson Sheltie Rescue organization, who stood nearby.

A finger lifting the dog's lips revealed blackened teeth.

The rescue group mustered volunteers to help the shelter work-

ers. Hirsch said a Nanuet store, Pet Nutrition, donated food and other supplies for the effort.

O'Connell had apparently lived a reclusive life. Neighbors of her 76 Spook Rock Road home said she was rarely seen and that they didn't know her.

Police took her to Good Samaritan Hospital for a medical evaluation on Wednesday.

No one answered a reporter's knock on her front door yesterday afternoon.

"I didn't know her, but she was very big in the Sheltie world," Barbara Bellini, president of the sheltie rescue group, said by telephone.

"This was a very well-respected person," Bellini said of O'Connell, "and apparently she fell on hard times. It's very sad. Sometimes people get overwhelmed. I'm just thankful that she, as well as the dogs, are getting the help they need now."

Before the dogs were shaved —

a simple cleaning wasn't possible because the fur was so thickly matted — they were photographed on an examination table.

"We want to show the condition that we found them in," said Susie Burr, an animal cruelty agent.

She and Marc Kissel, an agent with the Hudson Valley Humane Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said the dogs' conditions would be evaluated before charges were leveled against O'Connell.

"Right now, our main objective is to get them cleaned up for a medical assessment," Burr said. "There's just so much dirt and feces."

Kissel said that the medical findings would determine the specific cruelty charges that O'Connell would face.

SPCA agents and the Ramapo police converged on her home Wednesday on a tip from a furnace repairman who had seen the caged dogs and their squalid living conditions.

"I spoke to him," Burr said of

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the repairman, "and he was genuinely upset by what he saw. I'm thankful he stepped up and made the phone call."

Kissel said O'Connell did not readily acknowledge that her animals were suffering.

"She did not want to admit that the animals she obviously loved were not being properly cared for," Kissel said, "but it was obvious."

Hirsch said the Sheltie organization had rescued 368 dogs in the past decade.

Rescued dogs are brought up to date on their vaccinations, and are either spayed or neutered. They're also placed in "foster homes" to determine their temperament and the optimum environment for them.

None of the animals taken from O'Connell's home was ready for adoption, said Kenneth Ey, Hi-Tor's director.

Reach James Walsh at jawalsh@lohud.com or 845-578-2445.