

Most dogs involved in Marlborough animal-cruelty case now in temporary homes

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WEST SWANZEY — The Monadnock Humane Society has found temporary homes for 42 of the 52 Labrador retrievers involved in a high-profile animal-cruelty case, the organization's executive director said this week.

And though the shelter has spent more than \$50,000 on the dogs' care, donors have already made up that amount.

The dogs — along with a cat, Smittens — were taken from the Marlborough home of John Riggieri, 58, in July. Riggieri [is accused](#) of keeping the 52 dogs in filthy conditions and letting medical issues go untreated in more than 20 of them. He denies the charges.

The humane society is caring for the dogs pending Riggieri's trial, scheduled for Oct. 29.

At first, nearly all the dogs were housed at the humane society, straining the organization. An [Aug. 23 court order](#) authorized the humane society to place the dogs in temporary foster homes until trial.

It's more complicated than it sounds, said Kathy Collinsworth, the Monadnock Humane Society's executive director.

The organization started by "prioritizing homes that didn't have any kids, cats or other dogs because these dogs had never been around children," Collinsworth said. "Even though there was one cat in (Riggieri's) house, she was up in the third floor by herself."

Some Labs were placed in homes with other dogs, after supervised introductions to make sure the animals got along.

"Labs by nature are very friendly animals, so we had that going for us," Collinsworth said.

The 10 dogs still in the shelter have more complex medical or behavioral issues, making it harder to find a suitable foster home, she said.

Before it was allowed to start fostering, housing four dozen dogs caused the shelter to curtail other services.

"We were having to tell people who wanted, needed, for a variety of reasons, to surrender their animals to us that they had to wait," Collinsworth said. "... We just a week ago started making phone calls to say, 'OK, we have space now.' "

As of Aug. 8, operations director Emily Kerylow wrote in an affidavit that month, there were “multiple dogs housed in each room and dogs residing in staff offices and a public visiting room.”

Last week, the humane society had three free kennels, Collinsworth said.

The cost to the shelter as of Wednesday was \$56,420 and has been offset by fundraising, according to Collinsworth. A donor gave \$26,500 on the condition that other donors match it, for a total of \$1,000 for every animal taken from Riggieri’s property. Subsequent donations more than met that amount, totaling about \$30,000, according to Collinsworth. The same donor, who wishes to stay anonymous, has put up another \$26,500 match challenge.

Under state law, someone convicted of animal cruelty can be ordered to pay the animal care costs that were incurred while the case awaited trial. But defendants are often unable to pay, Lindsay Hamrick, New Hampshire state director for the Humane Society of the United States, said in an email.

“The non profits and the towns know they can’t depend on the restitution process to recoup costs and in most cases, they absorb 100% of those costs,” she wrote.

That could happen if Riggieri is convicted. He has filed for bankruptcy three times since late 2015, though each case has been dismissed. In dismissing the most recent one — filed in July — a judge barred Riggieri from filing another Chapter 13 bankruptcy case in New Hampshire for two years.

“I would say that he’s not going to have the ability to pay, even if they seek restitution,” Collinsworth said.

Though they act on behalf of the state in cruelty cases, humane societies are often reluctant to shift the burden onto taxpayers, she said. “If we were to charge the towns or the state or the city the true cost of care, our fear is that they may not be as eager to press cruelty charges.”

Should Riggieri be found guilty, a judge could force him to give up his dogs. In that case, according to Collinsworth, anyone fostering a dog would have the option to adopt it.

But for now, it’s not quite like having a normal pet.

Foster families know they could have to give the dogs back if Riggieri is acquitted. And because the dogs are evidence, they cannot leave the state. They can’t be spayed or neutered, either. Routine veterinary care, such as vaccinations, must be done at the humane society. Serious medical treatment requires a prosecutor’s approval, Collinsworth said.

Smittens the cat, meanwhile, seems to be settling in. For about two months, she stuck to a cat bed on a particular desk, Collinsworth said. “Now she’s wandering around, and she’s moved in, and she’s been sleeping in a chair at my office.”