

Charge against Durham dog breeder dropped

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DURHAM — Eighteen dogs are coming back home to the award-winning breeders of Silverhall Cocker Spaniels on Packers Falls Road after animal cruelty charges against them have been dropped.

“We’re very thrilled,” said Wilson Pike, whose misdemeanor charge of animal cruelty was dropped May 3, according to court records.

Durham police had seized the 18 cocker spaniels from Pike and his wife, Bonnie, on Feb. 12. Police said they took the dogs after investigating a tip that several dogs were being kept in poor living conditions. The charge against Bonnie Pike was soon dropped, leaving only a single count against Wilson Pike, the main caregiver of the dogs, according to Durham Deputy Police Chief Rene Kelley.

Kelley said he recently dropped the cruelty charge against Wilson Pike, too, after he agreed to the following conditions: A third party will assist the Pikes with maintaining a healthy environment for the dogs, they will submit to a Durham police inspection once a month for the next 12 months, and they will pay \$260 in restitution to the New Hampshire Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Stratham for boarding charges for two days. The Pikes had previously paid \$710 to the NHSPCA for boarding expenses, according to Kelley.

Wilson Pike said Wednesday he had no problem with the conditions of the agreement to drop the charge. “They are totally, totally welcome to come out and see what’s going on,” he said.

The Pikes maintained their innocence from the beginning and disputed charges of neglect. “We take wonderful care of our dogs,” Bonnie Pike told Foster’s on Feb. 12.

The Pikes have been breeding cocker spaniels at their home for decades for their business. They bred the cocker spaniel nicknamed Striker, which was named Best in Show in the American Kennel Club’s 2017 competition. The AKC honored the Pikes as the 2018 Breeders of the Year in the Sporting Group category. According to the AKC, the Pikes have bred 250 champions, and in 2018 they were inducted into the American Cocker Spaniel Hall of Fame.

After a short boarding stay at the NHSPCA, the cocker spaniels were placed in foster homes. Kelley said he worked with a person agreeable with the Pikes to find temporary homes for the dogs. “I didn’t want the Pikes to incur a huge bill from the SPCA,” Kelley said. “We ensured that the foster families were reputable and that they had experience with cocker spaniels, and we visited each home to make sure that the dogs were being well taken care of.”

“They went to wonderful, wonderful foster homes,” Wilson Pike said, crediting Kelley for allowing the foster home care, and now, “The dogs are coming home. They were put in wonderful, wonderful foster homes, and tomorrow is the first day of our lives. We’re very happy.”