

Police seek people who threw dogs off overpass

By Michael Stone

Friday, November 12, 2010

Inez Castleberry has two possible explanations for being able to help two dogs that were thrown off a U.S. Highway 27 overpass: coincidence or an "act of God."

As she was running a little late to work on Nov. 5, she saw a man next to a truck parked under the Chickamauga bypass along Battlefield Parkway. Beside him, she said, were two visibly injured dogs.

"And I thought, 'Uh oh, somebody's hit a dog [with a car]," she remembered. "I rolled down my window and said, 'Has someone hit a dog?' And he said, 'No, I saw someone throw two dogs off that bridge.'"

Castleberry, a receptionist for the Animal Medical Center of Fort Oglethorpe, loaded the dogs into her Jeep and took them to her job.

Veterinarians quickly began treating the dogs -- a Labrador mix named Dakota and a beagle mix named Hopper.

The dogs had been stolen from a Catoosa County home, authorities said. Since the incident happened in Walker County, both sheriff's offices are working the case.

If culprits are found, they will face charges of theft and cruelty to animals, authorities said. Deputies say they have some leads but haven't made any arrests.

"We had some individuals that the animals' owners suspected," Catoosa Sheriff's Capt. Scott Jordan said. "We've spoken with them on a number of occasions, but so far, we don't have any evidence or proof that they're the ones responsible for it."

Jordan said the man who saw the dogs thrown gave a description of the vehicle, but it wasn't "concrete" enough for a positive identification.

Candace Hadden, an associate veterinarian at Animal Medical Center of Fort Oglethorpe, said Dakota had a front leg injury that didn't require surgery, but Hopper's broken bone did.

Part of the treatment cost was paid by Catoosa Citizens for Animal Care, while the center absorbed the rest, Hadden said. Volunteering care is "part of life for us, especially these days," she said.

After seeing a news report about the incident, the dogs' owner claimed them, Jordan said.

"The owner didn't even know they were gone ... until their dogs were already being treated," he said.

Police are asking for help in finding the person or people who stole the dogs and threw them from the overpass.

Detectives for Catoosa and Walker counties can be reached at 706-935-2424 and 706-638-1909, respectively.

Castleberry said she's thankful the dogs are alive.

"At first I thought they'd have to be put to sleep," she said. "As it turned out, fortunately enough, that's not what happened."