

Sentinel

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Animal cruelty charges filed

Nasty pig stench



A dozen pot-bellied pigs huddled in the straw, on the floor next to the bed, beneath hanging clothes.*

New owner will bulldoze house

By Fred Hughes

Authorities filed 27 counts of animal cruelty charges Monday night against a Madison County man and woman who left dozens of animals at their former home after being evicted, the result of a foreclosure sale on their property.

They are identified as Hugh and Karen Koontz.

Hugh Koontz, 56, is a former editor of the *Marshall News-Record*. He was fired in February 2000 and a few months later began publishing a monthly newspaper called *Adventure Madison*. The masthead listed Koontz as editor and publisher.

ABOUT THREE YEARS ago, Koontz filed personal bankruptcy.

For several years Karen Koontz has been associated with animal shelters and rescue operations.

On Tuesday, health officials gave Karen Koontz the option of surrendering

the animals or they'd be seized. "They left approximately 95 pigs, two goats, some cats, dogs, roosters, hens, pigeons, a duck and a goose on the property," said Brian Repass, Madison County's interim health director.

THE DEADLINE FOR the former owners to be off the property was 5 p.m. Friday, March 1. That's when Madison County sheriff's deputies Lamar Worley and Hall Moore went to the residence and found that the owners had not left.

They were loading some animals, Worley said. However, the new owner of the property agreed to give them a few more hours to leave, according to the deputy.

"Friday night is where the sheriff's department was dealing with it and they dealt with it in the appropriate manner," stated Repass. The health director became involved early Saturday afternoon.

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Who's running?

Election

By Fred Hughes

One thing's now for certain. The election will not be held on Tuesday, May 7 as previously planned. The actual election date is not known, but speculation is that it will be in the summer, possibly mid-June.

THERE'S SO MUCH confusion resulting from legal challenges to redistricting that qualifying candidates for North Carolina's House and Senate races are not

even listed on the state election board's website.

NAMES OF state House and Senate qualifiers have not been submitted to local election offices either, Fay Ball, election supervisor, said late Monday afternoon.

Even so, the qualifying books in Madison County are closed, and apparently will stay that way.

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"Complaints we were receiving were actually regarding pigs being in the road . . . and the overflow from the pig pen into the road," Repass said.

"We've sent the animal control officer out there on a number of occasions and he didn't see anything that was actionable in terms of cruelty or neglect to be able to act," according to Repass.

While there's no law against having animals in a house, they "have to be provided the basics, there's no doubt on that," said Repass. "It appears that they were provided with the basics up until Friday night."

Repass met with Hugh and Karen Koontz at their new property Sunday morning, outside of Alexander in Buncombe County.

"Myself and a Buncombe County animal control officer went and we agreed that at that time they did not have the facilities to be able to handle these animals," he said.

"IN MY OPINION it would be putting them right back into the exact same situation, that they were coming from. It would take it a little while to get to there . . . they weren't prepared."

The Madison health director has been talking with Buncombe County animal control services "to insure that whatever did happen with the animals there would be some oversight."

In his discussions with Karen Koontz, Repass stated, "She has indicated that the pigs in her possession are the unwanted pigs of society." Karen Koontz also maintained that "they have received medical treatment, that they do get fed, watered, sheltered."

"Saturday, Sunday, today we're maintaining the effort, maintaining the animals and we are trying to deal with those two issues and negotiate a solution that cares for the animals and provides for the ultimate best disposition of the animals," Repass explained Monday morning.

Karen and Hugh Koontz "are interested in being involved with the disposition of those animals," Repass stated. "They want them back."

According to Repass, Karen Koontz has indicated that she's "had some medical

problems, and she's indicated that one of the trucks broke down. They've got excuses and they're [claiming to be] the victim in this situation," the director said.

"No matter what happens or what they say," he added, "they had time to take care of it. And if they had taken care of it, none of this would be an issue."

THE 27 COUNTS of animal cruelty were filed for pigs left inside the residence, according to Repass. All but one of the pigs are pot-bellied. "These (pot-bellied pigs) walk that line between pets and livestock," he said.

"She considers them pets."

The health director said that officials will do blood tests "on a significant number of the pigs for pseudo rabies," which is a pig communicable disease.

One case of scabies apparently has been diagnosed, Repass confirmed. But he described it as self-limiting. "It could spread within the herd, but apparently hasn't done so at this point," he stated. "We'll be investigating that as well."

During one of the meetings with Karen Koontz, Brian Repass said the woman "indicated to me that she raised \$2,000 to purchase a large part of these pigs from someone in Mars Hill who she didn't think was able to take care of them or they were being inbred or something like that."

"That was like a year and a half or two years ago from my understanding," Repass added.

There is some evidence that Karen Koontz was breeding some of the pot-bellied pigs, something that animal rescue groups are not supposed to allow.

About 24 hours after Karen and Hugh Koontz were supposed to have both the animals and their personal possessions off the property on Snowbird Road, an animal rescue group from Hendersonville appeared.

It was Saturday about 6:30 p.m., Repass said. The group, All Creatures Great and Small, brought a letter indicating that Karen Koontz had given them permission to remove the animals.

AFTER EXAMINING the document, Repass reported that it stipulated the group had permission to remove 65 pot-bellied pigs, 12 cats, 11 dogs, eight chickens, eight pigeons, two doves, animal equipment and medicine necessary for their care.

"Well, there's 95 pot-bellied pigs there," commented Repass. "So, if she thinks she only had 65, I mean she's off by a third."

"Our 95 count could be plus or minus three or four," said Repass. "Plus or minus 30 or 15 is just sort of hard to imagine."

Repass did not release animals to the group "because of the cruelty and ownership issues." He did learn that Karen Koontz had only contacted them about three hours earlier.

"It must have been about 6 o'clock," he said. "They were standing in the sheriff's department and saw the news clip on it and at that point they backed out and I haven't heard from them again."

"I think they were going to remove the animals and bring them to her new property," Repass speculated.

EUGENE AND Gladys Roberts wondered if their former neighbors were able to keep so many animals around because they were receiving grant money for their care. They hate the idea, if tax money was actually spent to create such a miserable situation.

Nasty pig stench solved

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While the Roberts expressed disgust at the horrible situation they had to face every day for years, they're not bitter. And they hope their former neighbors will get some help.

SAID GLADYS ROBERTS, " . . . I was sorry for him . . . I'm sorry for people like that."

"Whatever it takes," said her husband, "to get them (Hugh and Karen Koontz) back in the shape they ought to be, it'll all be worthwhile."

Late Tuesday afternoon, Brian Repass worked out an agreement for Animal Haven in Asheville to take about two-thirds of the animals. The county will hold 27 pigs until the Friday, March 22 court date.

Repass anticipates that all animals will be removed from the Snowbird Road residence by Wednesday. The health director said the state Dept. of Agriculture will assist with blood tests on the pigs.

In September 2000, the "Marshall News-Record" was merged with the "Madison County Sentinel". -- Editor ■



Food, dishes and trash were piled high on kitchen counter and appliances.*



Trash was all over the yard, and around the house.*



This is where Eugene and Gladys Roberts live. House occupied by Hugh and Karen Koontz is about one hundred yards behind the Roberts' home (not visible in photo).*



Hugh Koontz photo appears in *Adventure Madison**

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