

## TIME RAN OUT FOR 2 PUPS ON THE LOOSE IN FULTON

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Fliers posted along Mount Paran Road in north Atlanta still offer a \$500 reward for the return of two pure-bred hunting puppies, but people with information need not respond.

The leggy, white dogs were put to death last week; caught in an ultimately fatal web of conflicting stories and Fulton County animal shelter policies the dogs' owner calls "unconscionable."

Rhonda Milner bought the English pointer puppies Dec. 1 for her husband's birthday. The Milners had planned to relocate the 4-month-old, 20-pound dogs to a quail plantation they lease in Seminole County, but didn't get them out of town soon enough.

The dogs got loose from the Milners' back yard and slipped in through an open door; not for the first time; at the house behind them, owned by Christopher Klaus. Klaus is co-founder and chief technology officer for Internet Security Systems. He bought the house late last year for \$9 million, one of the most expensive houses ever sold in the city.

The dogs, Klaus' wife said in a telephone interview, got in under a fence. She called the pound. She told the dogcatcher the dogs knocked over her toddler and left muddy paw prints on a \$25,000 sofa.

According to a report by field supervisor David Brown: "I asked her if the owners lived around there and she said, 'Yes, but I'm not telling you.'

"She stated she hoped that the owners would not be able to get the dogs back," the officer wrote.

Klaus' wife, whom animal control officers listed as Chrissy Klaus, disputes this account. The woman, who said her legal name is Christy Fawcett, says she offered the officer the owners' phone number, taken from the collar of one of the dogs previously, but he wouldn't take it. The animals were not wearing ID tags when picked up by the county, according to an animal control report.

If someone refuses to identify the owners, animal control officers, such as the one who collected the Milners' dogs from the Klaus' house, can't compel the person to give that information, said Bill Garrett, executive director of the Atlanta Humane Society, which has a contract with Fulton County to run animal control. "What's he going to do? 'I'm going to get out my rubber hose [and beat you] until you do?' They are unarmed code enforcement officers," Garrett said.

The Milners, in the meantime, figured the dogs, worth \$500 each, had been stolen. Milner says when she called Fulton County Animal Control, she gave a complete description of the dogs and was told only, "We don't have any like that here."

However, Garrett said the three workers at the pound gave the Milners the standard line when they called: " 'We don't think the animals are here, but you need to come look.' "

Fulton County mandates that strays be kept 72 hours to give owners time to collect them. Because it gets nearly 13,000 dogs a year and has space for 75, anytime after the 72 hours, they can be euthanized. The Milners' dogs were picked up around 6 p.m. Dec. 16 and put down just over three days later.

Three-quarters of the dogs taken in by Fulton County are destroyed for financial reasons, Garrett said. The Humane Society operates the facility on \$1.9 million from the county plus about \$300,000 in fees and spent \$9,000 more than it got last year, he said.

Milner said the three-day destruction policy was "unconscionable."

Most metro Atlanta counties have a three-day time limit, said Debra Cook, manager of Cobb County Animal Control. But even the five days Cobb County allows isn't enough for a family that is on vacation when a dog gets away.

"We hate it when we have to select one to be euthanized, but you can't keep them all," she said. "It's unfortunate that that happened to those dogs. But people should go look even if someone tells them 'no.'"

Fawcett said she wanted the dogs' owners fined and she figured they wouldn't destroy the dogs for 10 days—enough time for their owners to collect them. "I felt horrible that the little dogs were killed."

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