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Dog shot in head with nails has plenty of fans

Trucker was in fine fettle Wednesday morning for the arraignment of the man accused of first battering his skull, then shooting him in the head with a nail gun.

The hound-heeler mix waited in the gazebo in the front yard of the Polk County Courthouse with an entourage of supporters, but his alleged assailant was nowhere to be seen. John Haynes of Humansville, accused of the crime, obtained his own attorney and was put on the "attorney docket." Those cases are routinely heard at 8:30 a.m., instead of the 10 a.m. arraignment schedule given to the public. So Trucker's supporters went home with only the information that Haynes will appear at 8:30 a.m. May 11.

Haynes and his attorney could not be reached for comment on Wednesday.

While Trucker waited at the



Trucker, who survived a beating and being shot in the head with a nail gun, is now at the C.A.R.E shelter, run by Melissa Sartin. The dog is blind in one eye and deaf from the attack.

Dean Curtis / News-Leader

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courthouse, he showered his caregivers and strangers with kisses and greeted all comers with a wagging tail. When told that Haynes' case had already been handled by the court, the dog's supporters stepped out of a light rain to talk just inside the courthouse door and Trucker followed. Once inside, the dog drew a walk-by crowd of courthouse employees wanting to meet the celebrity.

"He says he wants a Dr Pepper," said a laughing Carolyn Page, a courthouse employee who came by to pet the dog and saw him gazing longingly at the soft drink machine.

Trucker was accompanied to the courthouse by Springfield caregivers and volunteers at the Castaway Animal Rescue Effort (C.A.R.E.) shelter in Springfield, the agency that has cared for him since he was released from the Emergency Veterinary Clinic of Southwest Missouri, where nails were removed from his head and his damaged tissue and eye cared for.

When Haynes' next court appearance comes up, there will be many more supporters, said C.A.R.E. shelter director Melissa Sartin. "We were just notified yesterday that the arraignment would be today, and had no chance to prepare."

Still, several supporters accompanied the dog who doesn't yet bark.

"He needs a voice, and he doesn't have one," said Vanessa Lohman, a care provider at C.A.R.E.

"He just recently started talking to us, telling us when he wants to go out," said C.A.R.E. care provider Megan Trimmell.

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Lou Ann Potts, a Springfield volunteer at C.A.R.E., said she and granddaughter Tiara Mackey

came to "stand up for Trucker. I think he needs some people on his side for once."

As grade-schooler Mackey hugged Trucker, Potts said she and other supporters were amazed that Polk County Prosecutor John Porter charged Haynes only with misdemeanor animal abuse.

"We were shocked when we heard (Haynes) said the animal is vicious and that's why he tried to kill him," Sartin said. "From the time we took possession of him, when he was still in an awful lot of pain, the first thing he wanted to do was climb on our laps and give us kisses. I've worked with animals for 14 years, and I know aggressive animals. When I first heard of the misdemeanor charge, I was outraged. I don't see how bludgeoning a dog in the head is not vicious."

Brittany Campbell of Porter's office said Porter would be unavailable for comment Wednesday. But in an e-mail to C.A.R.E. supporter and Southern California cruelty caseworker Alison Gianotto, he explained his decision not to charge Haynes with a Class D felony for animal torture or mutilation.

"The dog was not mutilated, hence for it to rise to a felony crime," Porter wrote to Gianotto.

Potts, Trimmell and Lohman said they couldn't understand Porter's reasoning, given that the dog now has one blind eye, scars and deafness that may never go away.

Porter went on to define "torture," as defined in Black's Law Dictionary, as "To inflict intense pain to body or mind for purposes of punishment or to extract a confession or information, or for sadistic pleasure."

Porter's letter to Gianotto said Haynes' probable cause statement alleged that Haynes had been requested to put Trucker down because he had attacked two humans and killed puppies.

"... I can tell you there is no admissible evidence that contradicts this account ... I cannot prove that he was 'punishing' Trucker when he engaged in this conduct, nor can I prove that Mr. Haynes did what he did for sadistic pleasure," Porter wrote.

Potts said none of the C.A.R.E. workers have seen anything but affection from the dog from the time he came to the shelter.

"None whatsoever — not even with the kids," Potts emphasized.

After a long bout of pain medication, antibiotics and eye ointments, "his real personality has just come out," she said. "He's starting to play and be really frisky."

On Wednesday morning, he trotted on the courthouse lawn and in the foyer and accepted pats from just about everyone who passed. Putting his paws on C.A.R.E. care provider Katie Ames' shoulders and licking her face, the 10- to-12-month-old pup wagged his tail furiously.

Twelve prospective owners are being evaluated by the C.A.R.E. center to own the dog when he's ready to be released in about a month.

Sartin says the homes will be evaluated for ability to adapt to a disabled dog, how Trucker gets along with other pets in the family and whom Trucker himself chooses.

"You can really tell when he bonds with someone," she said. "He has signals, and he really wags his tail."

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