

20 Dogs Found Dead At Gilbert Boarding Home

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News

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GILBERT, AZ (CBS5) - Some pet owners burst into tears in front of a Gilbert boarding home Saturday night after learning the best friends had died.



While they were out of town, pet owners like Heather Bennett left their dogs with boarding home owner Todd Hughes and his family. Bennett said she expected Hughes to take care of her animals.

Instead, Bennett said Hughes called her on Friday telling her the dogs got loose and ran away.

"Where is our dog?" Bennett asked. "Is he alive? Just tell us where he's at."

A handful of other owners, many of them who remain out of town, received the same phone call. Another owner, who is on vacation in Florida, asked Linda Heller to help.

"We immediately went into dog-finding mode," Heller said.

Although several people launched a citywide search, no one found their dogs. Justin Butler was helping his family find their 6-year-old golden retriever, Koda. Saturday afternoon, Butler found out why no one could find him.

"Todd [Hughes] called everybody and said, 'Oh, your dogs got out and they're missing,'" Butler said. "They weren't missing. They're dead."

The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office discovered 20 dogs died Thursday night from heat exhaustion. Sheriff's Office spokesman Chris Hegstrom said Hughes wasn't home at the time of this incident. Instead, Hughes had other family members checking on the animals.

"One of the dogs chewed through an air conditioning wire overnight," Hegstrom said. "When the [Hughes family] checked on the dogs the next morning, many were already dead."

Hegstrom said there was a total of 28 dogs in the home. More than half of them died in a hot room.

Heller and Bennett met with the Hughes family Saturday night, demanding answers.

"He lied to the [dog's] owner who is on vacation," Heller said.

No criminal charges have been filed against Hughes or his family. Detectives said they believe what happened at the Hughes home was a tragic accident.

"It wasn't [a tragic accident]," Bennett said. "It was an act of negligence, completely."

According to Bennett, she was told one dog really did get loose and ran away. Her dark-haired husky-mix named Valor is still missing. Bennett spent Saturday night on horseback, searching for Valor in the Gilbert area.

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Since there are currently no criminal charges against Hughes, some pet owners suggested the matter will be settled in civil court.