

Star Tribune - October 24, 2009

### 30 Shih Tzus seized from Minneapolis home



By ABBY SIMONS

Each of the 30 Shih Tzus living in the tiny north Minneapolis home were affectionately named.

There was Honey and Gizzy, Itsy and Bitsy, Trinket and Tippy Toe.

But when Marilyn Fisher, manager of shelter operations for Minneapolis Animal Care and Control, picks up Scharmin, who weighs no more than a few pounds, it's clear something is wrong. The little dog's tail wags, but her pink tongue hangs limply from her mouth, the result of a years-old broken jaw that was never fixed. Others have skin diseases, their fur caked with urine and feces. Or they have missing teeth, or cataracts.

"A lot of them are going to need extensive veterinary care for the rest of their lives," Fisher said, gently stroking the trembling dog's fur.

It's a litany of challenges animal control officials now face in patching up most of the 30 medically neglected Shih Tzus seized Tuesday from the home of a 74-year-old Minneapolis woman who authorities say was practicing "back yard breeding" by selling the dogs through an online business, Tiny Paws Tzus. After neighbors complained of the smell coming from the house, authorities entered with a search warrant, and they seized the dogs despite the woman's resistance. Animal control will recommend charges for animal cruelty and neglect.

Fisher said the woman told authorities that the dogs accumulated when she was unable to sell them but became too attached to give them up. All the animals are adults, and they vary in age. Half are male and half are female, Fisher said.

Minneapolis ordinance calls for no more than three animals per household.

Though none of the dogs appeared to have been outwardly abused, it appeared that none were receiving veterinary care, a common problem among back yard breeders, said Dan Niziolek, manager of Animal Care and Control.

"That's our concern, whether it's these breeds or others, that people are trying to make some money off these dogs," Niziolek said. "Thirty dogs in a house under 1,000 square feet, you can imagine the smell, which was the basis for our complaints. Along with that, people get in over their heads and the care for the animals goes down. There's a lot of time and effort and costs that go into this, and the first thing to go when they can't afford it is veterinary care."

Such irresponsible breeding nearly always leads to poor conditions for the animals, Niziolek said.

"Fortunately, this case isn't the most horrendous we've ever seen, so we were able to intervene before it deteriorated. These cases can go downhill pretty quickly."

Fisher said that such confiscations are somewhat rare, but that for every operation dismantled, others continue business quietly.

If custody is granted to Animal Control, most should be available for adoption, Fisher said, reaching down to pet Trinket, who pranced in her cage and let out the first joyful yelp of the day.

Abby Simons 🍏 612-673-4921