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Veterinarian linked to abused Wolfeboro Great Danes

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While officials examine evidence they believe proves a woman abused dozens of Great Danes and operated an illegal business in her Wolfeboro mansion, the town's police chief said this week his department will begin looking into whether others were involved in the alleged crime, including at least one veterinarian.

Wolfeboro police Chief Dean Rondeau said he's "interested" that health certificates were signed by Dr. Kate Battenfelder of Bartlett, giving some dogs high marks for their physical condition, and that a subsequent examination conducted shortly after by Dr. Monique Kramer, who's affiliated with the North Conway Humane Society, found that those same dogs were suffering from contagious diseases, according to court documents.

"There are severe discrepancies between what one veterinarian has said and what the other had observed almost immediately after the examinations were completed by the first doctor," Rondeau said in a telephone interview. "Obviously we're very interested in all of this."

Christina Fay was arrested in mid-June and charged with two counts of cruelty to animals. Police found 75 Great Danes living in Fay's \$1.5 million mansion, with feces, urine and maggot-infested food everywhere.

Some dogs were kept in small cages while others roamed free. They had access to very little water, and were later diagnosed with an array of health problems and illnesses, including blindness, skin infections, contagious diseases, cuts and malnutrition.

Interviewed shortly after the arrest was made, Rondeau called the scene a "Petri dish." Fay waived her arraignment this week and is scheduled for trial Oct 25.

Raised in an affluent family, Fay had lived in New York City and Maine, and moved to Wolfeboro two years ago. Soon, she began advertising her business, De La Sang Monde Great Danes, online, attracting pure bred Great Danes from around the world. Puppies

were sold for thousands of dollars. Five later died, according to an affidavit.

Three veterinarians were listed as part of the business, including Battenfelder, and Deirdre Frey and Ezra Steinberg, both of whom practice in Maine.

According to court documents, four complaints about barking dogs at Fay's home were filed with police between September 2016 and May 2017.

On May 4, Tona McCarthy, director of field services at Pope Memorial SPCA in Concord, was told by Megan Fichter of the Lakes Region Humane Society that she'd received information and photos from a 16-year-old worker at the Wolfeboro mansion.

The photos, which were sent to McCarthy and later to the Wolfeboro Police Department, showed what appeared to be feces and maggots on the floor.

On May 8, Wolfeboro police Officer Michael Strauch went to Fay's residence to serve a barking dog complaint. As he got near the house, before meeting Fay, Strauch said "he was overcome by the smell of dog feces and urine," according to the affidavit he signed. "The floors of the kennels were thick with feces. I didn't see a clean area where the dogs could lay down."

Later that day, McCarthy gave Strauch the photos from Fichter. Then, during a week-long period in May, the Animal Rescue League of New Hampshire and North Conway Humane Society provided Wolfeboro police and McCarthy further evidence from another of Fay's employees who had taken photos of the filth and alleged mistreatment of the Great Danes.

On May 19, according to the affidavit, McCarthy received a photo showing a Great Dane with warts in its mouth and a health certificate signed by Battenfelder.

More tips were sent to McCarthy in the following days, implying Battenfelder signed off on health certificates for Great Danes that had later been examined by Dr. Kramer, who runs her own practice in Fryeburg, Maine.

Photos showed five dogs, once owned by Fay and issued health certificates by Battenfelder, that were missing paw pads, and had open wounds, ear mites and warts from what was believed to be the papilloma virus, a contagious herpes-like virus in dogs.

The May 23 section of the affidavit reads, "Tona examined the health certificate and examination sheets, he concluded that they do not correspond with each other as they should."

It continued: "Dr. Battenfelder's health certificate indicated that the Great Danes are healthy. Dr. Kramer's examinations indicated that the Great Danes have a variety of oral papilloma-like virus symptoms, decreased muscular tone, ulcer sores between the pad toes, bloody scabs, feet erosions, elevated eyelids and a body conditioning score of

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either two or three which indicates that the dogs are too thin.”

Reached by phone, Kramer said she examined seven dogs that had been given health certificates by Battenfelder.

“I can’t comment as to why infectious diseases that existed were not reported initially,” Kramer said. “You’re not supposed to give health certificates on animals that have any infectious or contagious diseases.”

An employee at Battenfelder’s Bartlett practice, the True North Veterinary Hospital, said the doctor “will not be commenting.”

In a series of recent comments sent to the *Conway Daily Sun*, Battenfelder denied knowledge that Fay’s dogs were sick, saying, “We believe the findings must have been a recent turn of events and we are heartbroken that things deteriorated to that level. We regret not knowing what was happening out of sight, and would have taken action if we were aware.”

When told of Battenfelder’s statement that the Great Danes’ ailments had surfaced after her examinations, Rondeau, the Wolfeboro police chief, said, “That’s not true,” adding that some of the subsequent exams by Kramer had happened shortly after health certificates were signed.

Lindsay Hamrick, the state director for the Humane Society of the United States, said teams of investigators flew in from the organization’s headquarters in Maryland to help local law enforcement remove the dogs, gather evidence and review paperwork.

“We did offer that resource to them and they took advantage of it,” Hamrick said. “I think we do have concerns about the lack of medical care that these animals received prior to our rescue. What everyone’s individual roles were in that and what they knew, I can’t comment on that because I don’t know.”

Hamrick added that the State **Veterinary Board would be part of any investigation looking into doctor conduct. A spokesman said no complaints have yet been filed, and the board’s next meeting is in September.**

Stephen Crawford, the state veterinarian, did not return phone messages or respond to an email.

Meanwhile, Rondeau said the investigation could last at least a year. He also said Battenfelder might not be the lone veterinarian that his department eventually questions.

“Tina was living in Maine,” Rondeau said. “There are connections, possibly to Maine veterinarians. There are a lot of different agencies looking into this, so if you read between the lines, the longer this case stays open, the greater the

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exposure to everyone who was connected to Tina Fay.”

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