

## **Fund for dropped dogs swells to \$10,000**

10/23/03

By HOLLY EDWARDS  
*Staff Writer*

As community donations to a reward fund to catch the person who tossed four dogs off an interstate overpass Monday grew to almost \$10,000, the Berry Hill police chief said yesterday he has never seen this much interest in a violent act against a human being.

Chief Robert Bennett, a dog lover, called the incident "a terrible thing" but said people should remember that terrible things are happening to people, as well.

"We had a gentleman murdered three or four nights ago, and no one called in wanting to donate to a reward fund," Bennett said. "If someone had thrown four people off the bridge, I'm not sure we would have gotten this much of a response."

Meanwhile, Berry Hill police followed several leads — some unsuccessfully — in their search for the perpetrator.

Police said someone threw the animals one by one off the 53-foot-tall bridge at the Interstate 440/65 interchange Monday morning. Two dogs, a male chow and a pregnant Labrador retriever, were dead at the scene.

The other two dogs survived the fall. The most seriously injured dog, a Belgian shepherd that suffered cuts and broken bones, was taken to a veterinarian for treatment yesterday and then returned to the Metro animal shelter. That dog had been labeled a German shepherd the day before in an apparent mix-up. The other dog, a hound mix, was not seriously injured.

A Lebanon woman who said the Belgian shepherd was stolen from her home more than a year ago is expected to take the dog's litter mate to the shelter today for a DNA test to determine whether she is in fact the owner, said Judy Ladebauche, Metro Animal Services Director.

The department is using donations that have come in for the dogs' veterinarian bills to pay the \$45 cost of the test, she said, adding that the results should be available in a few days.

The dog needs bone fusion surgery on its injured leg, which will cost about \$1,000, but Metro Animal Services cannot cover that expense, Ladebauche said.

Calls continued to pour into the Berry Hill police station and the Metro animal shelter yesterday from concerned residents who wanted to help the dogs and contribute to a reward fund to help catch the perpetrator.

The Billy Breeze and Marco in the Morning radio show on 102.5 The Party spearheaded the raising of almost \$10,000 from various sources for the reward fund as of late yesterday afternoon. The disc jockeys chipped in \$1,500 of their own money, and the Humane Society of

the United States announced it had contributed \$2,500 to the fund. The radio station also received a \$2,500 donation from Loews Vanderbilt Hotel.

Last night Berry Hill Police questioned the owner of a Lincoln automobile seen near the overpass Monday morning after a Metro police sergeant spotted the vehicle last night in west Nashville.

Metro Sgt. James Hamlet said he saw the woman near her west Nashville home and followed her into her driveway. He summoned Berry Hill police immediately.

Hamlet said a Berry Hill officer questioned the woman but did not arrest her. He also said the officer told him that she was only a person of interest, not a suspect.

Bennett had said earlier that the car's owner was "the only lead we've got, so if this doesn't pan out, that's it."

The person who pushed the dogs could face up to four years in prison if convicted of four counts of aggravated animal cruelty, which is a misdemeanor in Tennessee unless the person has a prior conviction for the offense, said David Raybin, a local attorney who has worked with animal rights groups.

If a person has a prior conviction for aggravated animal cruelty, the charges are classified as Class E felonies, which carry sentences ranging anywhere from not less than one year to up to six years in prison.