

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BLUE RIDGE JUDICIAL CIRCUIT



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Canton man sentenced to prison for dog fighting and animal cruelty
State vs. Randall Larry Thaxton

January 12, 2024 – District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway announces that earlier today Superior Court Judge Tony Baker sentenced Randall Larry Thaxton, 59, to 20 years with the first five years to serve in prison. Thaxton was found guilty of nine counts of dog fighting and seven counts of cruelty to animals, following a jury trial that ended on December 8, 2023.

Charges stem from an investigation involving multiple agencies in Cherokee and Paulding counties. In November 2022, Paulding County Sheriff's Office found evidence linking Thaxton to a man under investigation for dog fighting in Dallas, Georgia. In response to this tip, the Cherokee County Marshal's Office conducted a welfare check at Thaxton's Union Hill Road property on November 29, 2022.

After observing the condition of Thaxton's dogs, animal control officers advised him of several code violations, including tethering animals, providing adequate water and shelter, and providing veterinary care and rabies inoculation. Thaxton agreed to a reinspection date of December 14, 2022, to come into compliance with all observed violations. While onsite for the welfare check, the Marshal's Office also found signs that Thaxton was possibly involved in dog fighting. Officers noticed that eight of his dogs were tethered outside with heavy logging chains commonly used by dog fighters. The dogs were chained close to each other but just out of reach, a tactic that serves to build dog aggression. These signs of dog fighting, along with additional investigation, led to the Marshal's Office following up with a search warrant.

On December 6, 2022, the Cherokee Sheriff's Office SWAT team and the Cherokee County Marshal's Office arrived at Thaxton's property to execute a search warrant. Inside the home, they found items associated with dog fighting, including: a break stick (used to pry open jaws of a dog during a fight); documents linking Thaxton's dogs to other known dog fighters; a journal with workout regimens to prepare dogs for fighting; a catalog to order training equipment, steroids, staplers and medical supplies for treating wounds; contracts for the sale of specific dogs to known dog fighters; and a dog fighting creed pledging allegiance to the dog fighting community.

The same day, a veterinarian examined the dogs and found that they had skin infections, rashes around their necks from their collars, and swollen paw pads. One dog also had a growth hanging from his stomach. The Cherokee County Animal Shelter took custody of the dogs, one of whom was pregnant.

Thaxton was arrested on December 6, 2022, and charged with dog fighting and cruelty to animals.

"The average person doesn't realize how prevalent dog fighting still is. But the more we talk about this issue and educate the public, the more people will understand that dogs aren't 'just' property, and you cannot treat them in this way," said Chief Marshal Jamie Gianfala. "We appreciate the District Attorney's Office for taking this case on, recognizing it as a serious case, and holding the defendant accountable. Dog fighting is a felony crime and must be investigated and prosecuted as such."

Fighting dogs is illegal in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The crime is prevalent in cities, suburbs, and rural areas. Dogs are housed on rural properties or hidden in basements, and fights are held outdoors, in barns, abandoned buildings, and other locations.

“Dog fighters operate hidden in plain sight, in an organized, criminal enterprise that includes breeding and selling dogs, training dogs, hosting and spectating violent fights, and fighting dogs to the point of exhaustion or serious injury. It is a despicable activity that is incredibly cruel to the dogs,” said Animal Crimes Resource Prosecutor Jessica K. Rock, Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council of Georgia. “By prosecuting dog fighters, we bring this underground world to light, ensure that these dogs receive the justice they deserve, and work toward someday completely eradicating this crime.”

At the December trial, the State called 11 witnesses to testify and presented more than 300 exhibits, including photos, the physical evidence found in defendant’s home, heavy logging chains, and the thick collars the dogs were wearing. After the jury deliberated for about three hours, Thaxton was found guilty of 16 counts.

“This was a challenging case to present to a jury, involving not only presenting extensive evidence but also educating average citizens about the complex world of dog fighting,” said Assistant District Attorney Rachel Murphy. “While this defendant only had nine dogs at the time of his arrest, there was evidence that for decades, he contributed to the vicious cycle of breeding and selling dogs for the purpose of dog fighting - 216 offspring alone just from the nine dogs involved in this case.”

During the sentencing hearing, the State recommended a sentence of 20 years with 8 years to serve. The Defense argued for 20 years with two years to serve. At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Baker sentenced the defendant to 20 years with five years to serve. He was ordered to pay \$45,000 in fines and complete 360 hours of community service. He is also forbidden to own, possess, or breed dogs, and he may have no contact with any dog fighters, individuals who attend dog fights, or individuals who participate in any capacity in dog fighting.

“Let this be a clear message that Cherokee County will not accept or condone inhumane treatment of animals – especially the violence and abuse associated with dog fighting,” said District Attorney Susan K. Treadaway. “It is time as a society that we step up and stop the abuse and mistreatment of innocent animals. Ordinary citizens can play a part in stopping the abuse of animals by recognizing signs of dog fighting and reporting concerns to law enforcement.”

In Cherokee County if you have concerns about dog fighting, call the Cherokee County Marshal’s Office at 678-493-4080. In case of emergency, call 911.

The case was investigated by the Cherokee County Marshal’s Office and prosecuted by Assistant District Attorney Rachel Murphy, Office of the District Attorney, Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit, with the assistance of Animal Crimes Resource Prosecutor Jessica K. Rock, Prosecuting Attorneys Council of Georgia.

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The Office of the District Attorney for the Blue Ridge Judicial Circuit is committed to seeking justice, acting with integrity, and collaborating with partner agencies in the criminal justice system in order to protect the citizens of Cherokee County and the State of Georgia.

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