

# DOGS RULING BRINGS JOY, SORROW

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Both sides were crying Friday.

Palm City dog breeder Barbara Alesi cried tears of joy at the thought of seeing many of the purebred dogs the county seized from her 2 1/2 years ago. The men and women who opened their homes to care for the 110 purebred Lhasa apsos and Shih Tzus the county seized from Alesi's home sobbed at the prospect of losing the dogs that have become part of their families. The tears followed an appeals court order Thursday upholding another judge's order to return up to 100 of the dogs to the new state-of-the-art kennel Alesi has built next to her home on Gator Trail.

"She's on my boat all the time," boat captain Woody Woodruff said of one of Alesi's favorite Lhasa apsos, which his family renamed Fantasia from its registered name of Tara Angel.

"I take her to work in a basket on my bicycle," Woodruff said, bursting into tears. "She's been a good friend. I hate to see her go."

Officials for Martin County and the Humane Society of the Treasure Coast, the agencies that seized the dogs in August and October 2000, said they have not decided whether to appeal the order to a higher court. At the time of the seizures, many of the dogs were living in stacked cages and suffered from skin and eye problems. Many had long hair matted with feces.

"Of all of the possible outcomes, this was not the one we expected," Humane Society Executive Director Wally Burleson said.

She said the foster families who have cared for the dogs are grieving.

"They've sought me out for relief and comfort and all I can do is open my arms and give a warm, big hug," she said.

She said the organization will consider the emotional strain on the families before deciding whether to appeal the order.

"How much more can our foster parents take not knowing?" Burleson said. "This is like a death."

Alesi's attorney, **Lance Richard**, said he and Alesi have not decided how to resolve the case that has caused so much heartache for everyone involved for so long.

"She understands she's going to be ripping them out of homes just like they were ripped out of her home," he said of the two dozen dogs she wants returned. She sold 44 of the dogs to foster families after Indian River County Judge Joe Wild ordered their return in September 2001.

The judge required Alesi to hire staff to care for the dogs, get them inspected by veterinarians once a month and allow the sheriff's office to inspect the dogs and kennel at any time. But those restrictions will not take effect unless the court order is final.

Alesi does want some of the dogs back for breeding purposes, **Richard** said.

"We discussed getting some of the dogs back . . . using them as studs, then returning them to the families at some point," he said.

"We talked about taking the high road. She wants to handle this the right way."

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