

Another big catch at Navarre Beach

Photo by Romi White
Kenny Peterson, Adam Madison and Joey Polk wrestle to bring Peterson's 10-foot, 7-inch mako shark ashore at Navarre Beach Fishing Pier March 1. The shark had a 61-inch girth and its estimated weight was 680 pounds. Peterson is the younger cousin of Joey and Earnie Polk, who attracted an international spotlight to the Florida panhandle last year when a photo of one of their large catches went viral.



COMMUNITY

Dog fights for her life following severe neglect

By Ashley Varese
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When Dr. Natalie Dyson first laid eyes on Ava, she thought the white Labrador was an elderly dog ready to be euthanized.

Unfortunately, she was wrong. Ava was just 2 1/2 years old. The once spunky pup who loved accompanying her mom on runs weighed only 18 pounds.

After tests for parasites and worms came back negative, Dyson knew the only explanation for Ava's dire situation was neglect.

"She was so skinny the first couple of days that I could feel her spine from her stomach," she said.

Dyson, who has worked with the county on abuse cases, said she's never seen a case as severe as Ava's.

"I've never seen a dog that was still alive in this condition," she said.

Laying in the back room at St. Francis Veterinary Center, Ava's ribs are still visible and her spine is protruding out of her back. It's been nine days since she first arrived, and she's still too weak to stand up. She tries, especially when she has a visitor, but she just crumbles back on to her blanket.

She has IVs strapped

to her two front paws, and since she is unable to stand to go to the bathroom, she's using a catheter. The first few days, she couldn't even lift her head.

When she first arrived at St. Francis Veterinary Center, her blood values were off, she was anemic and had very low protein levels. She had gastric ulcers that were bleeding.

"She was so cold that her body temperature wouldn't even register on the thermometer," Dyson said, adding that if the owner hadn't brought her in when he did, Ava probably would have been dead the next day.

Dyson said Ava was dehydrated so they immediately started her on fluids and focused on warming her.

"Food was not the main thing at that point," she said.

Dyson also gave Ava a blood transfusion, using the blood from her own Great Dane.

Because her situation is so critical, Dyson takes Ava home with her every night.

"She needs to maintain her body temperature, I needed to ensure that her

IV was flowing," she said, adding that the first three days were touch and go. "Medicating, feeding. I was getting up three times during the night to feed her."

But Ava's life wasn't always this heartbreaking.

She used to go running with her mom and spend time at the dog beach in Pensacola.

Ava's mom, who no longer had custody and hadn't seen her in a year, said Ava was always chewing up pillows.

"I could never get her a dog bed because she would tear it up," her mom, Tracy, said. "She was very active, I taught her how to give her paw. She's really smart. We would go on runs all the time together and she always knew when it was time to sprint."

Tracy never expected to receive a call from the vet.

"Dr. Dyson called and told me the severity of the situation," Tracy said. When she learned that Ava might not make it and that she weighed close to nothing, Tracy broke down crying.

"When she called, she said 'I have to warn you, she looks like a skeleton with skin over it,'" even move. Her eyes were recessed into her head.



Submitted photo
Ava in January 2014, when she weighed 57 pounds.

Tracy said. Tracy headed straight to St. Francis.

"She was in a crate and I just saw her head and my heart sank. I thought of her as my girl who went on runs with me and who was so energetic and full life."

But Ava couldn't

even move. Her eyes were recessed into her head.

"She looked like a corpse," Tracy said.

A Pensacola resident who studies full time at the University of West Florida, Tracy made her way to Navarre twice a day to visit Ava.

She brought blankets and scarves so Ava would remember her scent and just spent time with her at St. Francis.

"I read her my financial strategy book last week while I was getting ready for midterms," she said.

On the second day, Ava took Tracy's arm in her paw and used what little strength she had to push herself against Tracy's chest.

Late Friday afternoon, Tracy was able to take Ava home, but Dyson said she has a long road ahead of her; she'll need two to three months to build up the muscle she lost.

She's gained 13 1/2 pounds since she's been at St. Francis' and she now weighs 31 1/2 pounds – an adult Lab should weigh between 56 and 57 pounds, according to Dyson.

"She's going to need a lot of rehab," Dyson said. "Just over the past two or three days she's made great strides in recovery, building strength and moving."

Ava will need routine lab work and physical therapy to get her muscles strong enough to support her body again. Dyson said in addition to \$4,000 for her initial stay, follow-up care will cost a few thousand dollars as well.

Dyson also said Santa Rosa Animal Control was made aware of the situation.

Even after all she's been through, Ava's tail is still in working order – thumping up and down when she sees a new face.

"She's such a fighter," Tracy said, leaning over to give Ava a kiss.

If you'd like to donate to Ava's medical bills, contact St. Francis Veterinary Center at 850-936-4446.

Photo by Ashley Varese
Ava, a 2 1/2 year-old Lab, has gained 13 1/2 pounds since she arrived at St. Francis Veterinary Center two weeks ago.



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