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Police: After Dog Died in His Care, Darien Man Lied to Animal's Owner, Veterinarians and Cops

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Dogs boarded at Terry's House of Pets in Darien were often kept locked in a motor vehicle while the business's owner ran errands, were forced to compete for food tossed onto an unsanitary garage floor — in a room that was not climate controlled — and the animals never were let outside for fresh air or exercise, according to an arrest warrant affidavit from Darien police.

- *This article [originally was published](#) by [NewCanaanite.com](#). Unless otherwise noted, the information in it is from court documents filed by Darien police, which include accusations not proven in court.*



Betsy Gammill of New Canaan. Contributed

When a young golden retriever died in his care in July — likely from exposure to extreme heat — the owner of the Hoyt Street business, Terry Burns, appears to have lied to the dog’s New Canaan owner as well as to emergency veterinary workers and police, according to the arrest warrant application submitted by Darien Police Officer Richard Flood.

Though Burns told the staff at Norwalk’s [VCA Veterinary Referral and Emergency Center](#) that the dog, Betsy, had “collapsed suddenly after playing outdoors,” that “did not make sense,” according to the testimony of vets cited by Flood in his application, signed by Stamford Superior Court Judge John Blawie.

Terence Burns. Photo courtesy of the Darien Police Department

“Evidence indicates this golden retriever died of heat stroke some time before arriving deceased at the emergency hospital,” said the document, filed in state Superior Court in Stamford.

Burns, 44, who lives at the 259 Hoyt St. home where police say he had operated an unlicensed boarding facility, was [charged Oct. 6 with animal cruelty](#). Originally scheduled to be arraigned Monday, Burns’s appearance has been put off to Nov. 2, court records show.

It isn’t clear how long Burns had been operating his kennel or how many dogs and clients he had. Burns could not be reached for comment. The arrest warrant application from Flood describes a neglectful animal boarding facility whose owner easily lied about what was happening with his charges.



Mimi (top) and Betsy Gammill of New Canaan. Contributed

A condition of Burns's \$25,000 bond release from police custody is that he possess no animals of any kind or attempt to provide "care" for any animals, according to the arrest warrant application from Flood, a 21-year police veteran.

Mimi Gammill of New Canaan, Betsy's owner, has said she is "heartbroken" by the loss of her dog.

Gammill said that she received three personal references for Terry's House of Pets and that she did a thorough site visit at the Hoyt Street facility, and that during that visit Burns did not show her a garage at all.

According to Flood's application, he interviewed Gammill on July 27, eight days after Betsy had died. Burns had been paid \$50 per day since last November to mind the dog while she worked during the day, as well as for some overnights.

On July 19, Burns phoned Gammill "reporting that Betsy was experiencing medical distress, and he asked her where he should take the dog for assistance," the application said. Gammill said she then researched a facility and found the emergency vet at VCA in Norwalk and instructed Burns to take Betsy there.

"Ms. Gammill was later notified her dog died at that facility," Flood wrote.

Betsy Gammill of New Canaan. Contributed

However, two veterinarians at VCA said the body temperature of Betsy at the time she was brought in, already deceased, debunked the explanation that the dog had died while playing.

The dog was in good overall health, according to medical records, and on arrival at VCA “had an extreme

body temperature, so high it was unable to be recorded on a standard thermometer — normal temperature for a dog is 101 to 102.5 degrees, and additionally had symptoms of rigor mortis” or stiffening of muscles after death, the application said.

As part of the investigation, on Aug. 4 Flood interviewed Burns at the Hoyt Street house/business together with a state Animal Control officer. There, Burns reiterated that Betsy had collapsed on July 19, and “He stated it was a very hot and humid day and that he was giving Betsy exercise at the request of Ms. Gammill, and after being in the yard for some time, Betsy collapsed, after which he transported her to the noted VCA facility, where she later died,” Flood wrote.

“Terry Burns showed us the garage where he keeps the dogs in his care, which we observed was not climate controlled, nor was it sufficiently clean,” Flood said in the affidavit. “Burns is not licensed to run a kennel from his home, nor anywhere else. He does not have a registered business in the town of Darien.”

Burns additionally was cited for operating an illegal kennel, issued a cease-and-desist order by the state “and upon the return of the dogs already in his care to their homes, not to receive any other dogs into his home for the purposes of dog sitting.”