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SEEING THE BIG PICTURE OF DOG-FIGHTING

Animal welfare organization highlights dog-fighting and other cruelty across the United States using interactive maps

Pet-Abuse.Com, an organization nationally recognized for their efforts to implement cutting edge technology in the fight against animal cruelty, recently launched a project that shows the public just how widespread a problem animal cruelty really is.

This groundbreaking project is intended to illustrate just how common animal cruelty is across the country, and Pet-Abuse.Com president Alison Gianotto believes the timing is right for this project to be launched.

"Animal cruelty is an issue that often doesn't inspire people to speak out until it hits close to home," Gianotto says. "Because of the extensive media coverage related to the Michael Vick dog-fighting allegations, the public is starting to see some of the horrors that animals go through. It's been a real wake-up call for some."

Gianotto says that although there has been tremendous media coverage on the Michael Vick dog-fighting allegations, Vick isn't the first professional athlete to be charged with dog-fighting and animal abuse. "Any situation of animal cruelty is terribly tragic, but it's even more of an outrage when the perpetrators are considered heroes by so many. These are men that our children look up to and idolize. Whether these athletes want to be or not, they are role models to millions of children across the country. The example they're setting is that animal abuse for fun, profit or out of anger is okay, and that breaking the law is okay if you're famous enough."

Former NBA Trailblazer **Qyntel Woods** pleaded guilty in January 2005 to animal abuse and as part of a plea agreement, was sentenced to a year of probation and 80 hours of community service. Woods now plays for the Miami Heat.

Atlanta Falcons defensive tackle **Jonathan Babineaux** was arrested in February of this year on a charge of felony animal cruelty. Babineaux is accused of beating his live-in girlfriend's dogs to death after an argument.

Chicago Bears' defensive tackle **Tank Johnson's** home was raided in December 2006 on a warrant for drugs and suspected weapons violations. Johnson surrendered "Trina" and his two other pit bulls to the county's Animal Control Program in December 2006, six days after police searched Johnson's home in Gurnee. Animal control wardens had been called to Johnson's home six times that year for animal nuisance complaints and suspicion of animal cruelty.

Former NFL running back **LeShon Johnson** has been charged multiple times with fighting dogs between 2000 and 2004, and pled guilty to reduced charges in 2005 for a case involving 141 dogs. As part of a plea agreement, Johnson's sentence was deferred, and he was placed on 5 years probation and ordered to pay a fine and restitution.

Nathaniel "Nate" Newton, a former NFL player with the Dallas Cowboys, was arrested at a dog fight in 1991. Newton played for the Cowboys from 1986 to 1998. Just last week, former NFL player **Steve DeOssie** described on WEEI radio in Boston that he attended a dog-fighting event during his playing days with Newton and other teammates.

Todd McNair, a Houston Oilers running back, was arrested and charged in 1996 with 81 offenses involving the mistreatment of 22 pit bulls being trained on his property for dogfights.

Her organization already provides interactive maps on a state-wide level, where users can see a snapshot of cruelty cases within their own state, but a national map has never been available before. The new maps allow website users to view an overlay of cases within a particular type of animal cruelty, dog-fighting, for example.

Pet-Abuse.Com was founded in the aftermath of a tragic animal cruelty case, when a southern California cat was stolen and set on fire. The suspect in that case was never caught after fleeing the country, but the organization has posted over 1,600 open cases across the country, and currently works with Sacramento-based United Animal Nations to target open cases for the UAN Zig-Zag reward program.

“A high-profile case will often incite hundreds, if not thousands, of letters to prosecutors asking for justice – but what some pet lovers don’t realize is that cruelty is occurring all around them, and it’s up to our communities to put an end to it.”

While the maps are not all-inclusive, and only reported incidents can be represented, they will be an invaluable tool for law enforcement, animal welfare agencies and the public.

To check out the new mapping system, visit the Pet-Abuse.Com website at www.pet-abuse.com.

Pet-Abuse.Com maintains the largest searchable database of criminal animal abuse cases, which contains almost 10,000 cases of criminal animal cruelty in the United States alone. The organization educates the public on the connection between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, and provides unique tools for animal advocates, such as the ability to monitor specific cases for updates, a national listing of upcoming court dates for criminal cruelty cases, online action alerts and wireless access to the animal abuse database. For more information or to make a donation, visit www.pet-abuse.com.

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