

Multiple People Accused of Abusing, Killing At Least 10 Dogs at Black Rock Canines in Naugatuck

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Multiple people are accused of abusing and killing at least 10 dogs at Black Rock Canines in Naugatuck and have been arrested. This comes days after the business's owner, who is a police officer, was arrested when explosives were found at his Stratford home. Police said two more people have been arrested amid ongoing investigations at the business and the owner is now facing additional charges.

In late April 2022, the State of Connecticut Dept. of Agriculture-State Animal Control Unit, the Connecticut State Police and the Stratford Police Department contacted Naugatuck Police Department about a joint investigation involving the allegations of the storage of illegal explosives, guns and possible animal cruelty at Black Rock Canines on Hunters Mountain Road. David Rivera Jr. is a sworn New Canaan police officer and owns Black Rock Canines. Police said the business is a training facility for potential military and police canines as well as for privately owned canines by people seeking such training.

Naugatuck police said they initiated their own investigation and through interviews, it is believed that numerous canines of all ages and breeds have been abused and injured during their time at Black Rock Canines. Investigators said they believe at least 10 canines were killed by employees of the business. The dogs are believed to have been shot and killed and then buried on the property by the owner or operators of the business. State police said they have found the remains of four dogs there.

New Canaan police said Rivera has been placed on leave and is currently prohibited from serving as an active duty officer. The police department said he'll remain on leave pending the results of the criminal case and the internal investigation. A general manager of the business, identified as Daniel Luna, is accused of abusing numerous dogs and puppies during his employment, police said. He is accused of shooting dogs that were no longer viable to the business and is also accused of leaving puppies outside in harsh weather elements leading to their death.

Luna turned himself into police on Monday and is facing charges including cruelty to animals, conspiracy to commit cruelty to animals, reckless endangerment, unlawful euthanization, conspiracy to commit unlawful euthanization and identity theft. He was held on a \$225,000 bond and was arraigned on Tuesday. According to police, during their investigation, they learned Rivera Jr. had directed employees to move explosives from Mountain Road to the Naugatuck Event Center for training. The explosives were allegedly stored in Tupperware containers and were being handled by employees without training or proper permits. State police said the explosives were obviously obtained illegally and there were several pounds of explosives found.

Rivera Jr., turned himself in to Naugatuck Police Department on Monday and was charged with reckless endangerment, conspiracy to commit cruelty to animals and conspiracy to commit euthanization of a canine. He was released after posting a \$150,000 bond and is due in court on May 18. These charges are in addition to the charges he was arrested on last week. Authorities said Rivera Jr.'s father, David Rivera Sr. was also arrested after police were called to the business on Friday for a report of employees being threatened.

Rivera Sr. is accused of threatening a current employee and a former employee with a knife. He was charged with threatening and breach of peace and was released after posting a \$25,000 bond. He is scheduled to appear in court on May 11.

On Tuesday, police said they obtained an additional warrant, which allowed state and local animal control officers to remove the remaining 31 dogs at Black Rock Canines. The dogs have been placed in a shelter and will remain there as the investigation continues. Rivera Jr. was previously arrested after explosives were found at his Stratford home, according to the Fairfield state's attorney and he has been placed on leave from the police department.

Last Thursday, Rivera Jr. was charged with illegal possession of explosives, illegal storage of explosives, illegal possession of an assault weapon, illegal storage of a firearm and three counts of improper transfer of a firearm, according to Fairfield state's attorney Joseph Corradino. During a search of Rivera Jr.'s home, police found high explosives improperly stored, Corradino said, citing an arrest warrant affidavit.

The state's attorney said Rivera Jr. is alleged to have used the explosives in his business training working dogs for various organizations and the warrant states that he had no permit for the possession of the high explosives and also had an assault weapon.

Police said they believe the business opened in 2019, but people have come forward in the last several weeks, which is what prompted the investigations.