

Where The Wild Things Are

By Anna Scott

On Monday, June 16, Lejla Hadzimuratovic, an actress and volunteer for the nonprofit People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, went to gather video and photographs of a vendor selling birds near 12th and Maple streets.

Known for occasionally employing confrontational, attention-grabbing tactics, PETA frequently uses cameras, sometimes hidden, to expose animal abuse or mistreatment.

Twenty-year-old Crystal Avarez and a 17-year-old girl, who asked that her name not be revealed because she feared retribution, accompanied Hadzimuratovic. The two said they are not affiliated with PETA.

After the three began snapping photos, Hadzimuratovic and Avarez said, the two vendors, a man and a woman, confronted them. They argued, and minutes later, they said, two vehicles pulled up and a group of women jumped out. The three were battered and chased away.

"They started pushing and slapping us and asking for identification," said Avarez. "We started running to the car, and they [would not] let us get in. It was like a mob."

Police officers from the Newton Division, which patrols the district south of Ninth Street, quickly arrived on the scene. Det. Alex Aridando, who is handling the case, could not reveal details of Hadzimuratovic and Avarez's account because the incident is under investigation. He did, however, confirm that an attack took place.

"There was a battery involved," he said. "The Department of Animal Regulations, the Animal Cruelty Task Force and Animal Control and the senior lead officers from Central and Newton divisions are aware of this incident."

"This is an ongoing problem in the garment district."

Members of the Fashion District BID hope the episode will spotlight the rampant pet sales. The weekend of June 20, LAPD officers working with the BID's Clean and Safe Team confiscated 37 turtles, eight birds, six rabbits and two reptiles. The BID subsequently turned the would-be pets over to the city's animal control authorities. "I think we're finally going to see some focus on this problem," said Tampa.