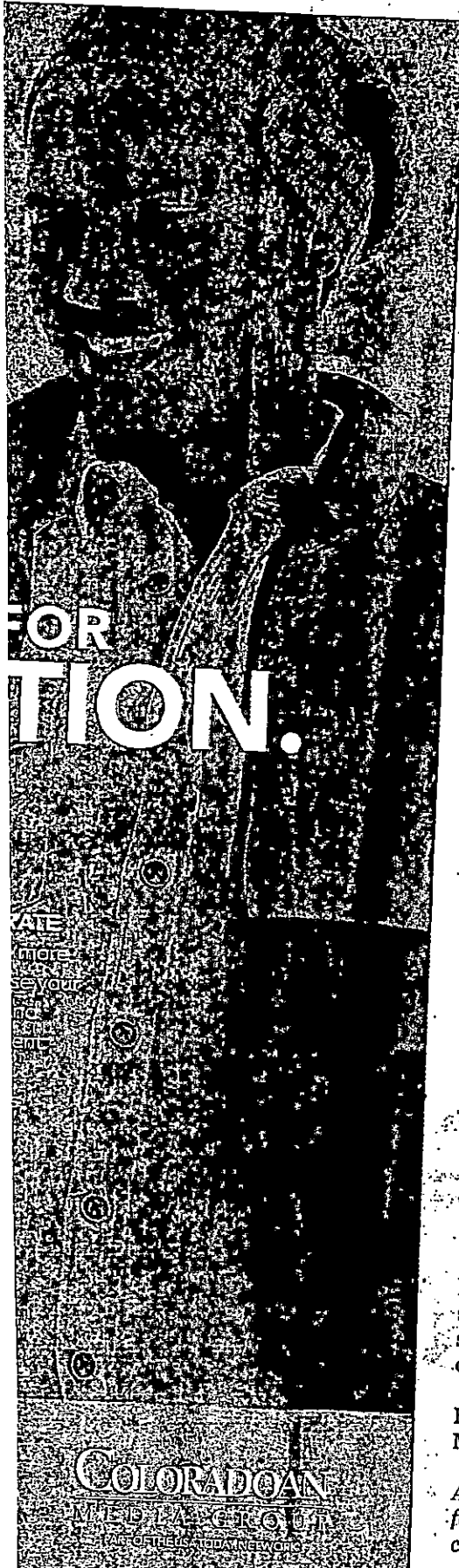


FORT COLLINS COLORADOAN



Man accused of stealing, abusing cats enters plea

Sady Swanson Fort Collins Coloradoan
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Fort Collins man accused of stealing and abusing cats pleaded not guilty Tuesday and will undergo a court-ordered mental health evaluation before his next court appearance.

Bryan Hackleman, 24, pleaded not guilty to three counts of aggravated cruelty to animals and one count of theft of property valued between \$300 and \$750.

Police responded to Hackleman's home in August when Hackleman's roommate reported he found a dead cat in Hackleman's closet. Hackleman told police he stabbed the cat after he said the cat attacked him several times, according to the police report.

Investigators discovered several collars in Hackleman's bedroom, which prosecutors said helped connect him to three prior reports of missing cats in the area.

Hackleman was charged with theft for allegedly stealing three cats, Eighth Judicial District Judge Julie Field said when she asked for Hackleman's pleas. The prosecution told the court they had made a plea offer to Hackleman, which asked him to plead guilty to one count of aggravated animal cruelty and one count of theft. If Hackleman had accepted the agreement, the sentence would have been open to the court, with wellness court as a sentencing option.

Hackleman told the judge he did not want to accept the offer from the district attorney's office.

The Larimer County District Attorney's Office received a letter from the defense indicating a doctor had diagnosed Hackleman with three mental health conditions that could have contributed to his alleged actions, the prosecution said.

Field ordered Hackleman to undergo a state mental health evaluation with a psychologist, and a report from the psychologist will be given to the court.

Because Hackleman is out on bond and not in custody, he will not be required to have the evaluation done at the state hospital in Pueblo, but Field said she wasn't exactly sure what the evaluation process was for people out of custody.

The hope, Field said, is the report will be completed by Hackleman's next appearance, which was set for 1:30 p.m. March 19.

All suspects are innocent until proven guilty in court. Arrests and charges are merely accusations by law enforcement until, and unless, a suspect is convicted of a crime.



Bryan Hackleman

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