



Activists cheer cancellation of puppy expo

Missouri business denied license to sell dogs in Peoria

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PEORIA — Animal rights activists claimed victory this week when a puppy expo planned for this weekend at Exposition Gardens was canceled.

Lauren Malmberg, director of the Peoria Animal Welfare Shelter, said Wednesday the event was canceled after the organizers' application for a transient business license to sell puppies in Peoria was denied.

"We were notified on the 18th that application had been made and discovered they were out of state," Malmberg said.

Organizers Joy Thomas, Judy Hodge-Smith and Kae Sherrill, operating under the business K9 Kabin, are from Missouri.

"I called the ag department to confirm they did not have the appropriate license to operate in Illinois as a dog dealer, or kennel or pet shop operator, so I consulted with our legal department," Malmberg said. "We denied their application based on the fact they did not hold a state license."

K9 Kabin officials could not be reached to respond to comments by Malmberg and others. But even if K9 Kabin had been granted a license, the owners probably would have met a hostile atmosphere in Peoria. Dozens of animals rights activists had been e-mailing and calling each other to protest its operation as soon as the advertisement appeared Sunday in the classified section of the Journal Star, Malmberg said.

A group called The Puppy Mill Project that monitors puppy sales has been mobilizing members all across the state.

The K9 Kabin group is licensed through the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a commercial dog breeder.

Activists had planned to stage a protest at Expo Gardens in Peoria.

"This is not the first time we've stopped a puppy expo," said Cari Meyers, who runs The Puppy Mill Project, based in Chicago. "I have a group of 150 warriors as I call them, and with phone calls and e-mails, about 900."

One of the "warriors" is Doris Mueller of Peoria, who formed Peoria Area Voices for Animals three years ago.

"We were just going to be holding signs and getting people to be aware of the situation and not be impulsive buyers," Mueller said about the protest they had planned. "The public doesn't have a chance to see the parents. Puppy mill puppy problems don't manifest themselves until the dogs are much older."

Animal rights activists use the term puppy mill to refer to commercial breeders with USDA licenses.

"They have hundreds of dogs which live outside in cages with wire flooring, and they are all bred to be sold," Meyers said.

Meyers said her group, in conjunction with other advocates from Illinois, did some investigation and found the Missouri-based K9 Kabin's owners had several U.S. Department of Agriculture violations.

"This has got to stop," Meyers said. "They are running puppy mills."

A recent report by Missouri's Better Business Bureau found that 30 percent of federally licensed dog breeders are located there, four times the number of breeders in the next-highest state.

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