



## America Inspired winner Cari Meyers: We have so much left to do

By Kathy Mordini, Chicago Pets Examiner

Cari Meyers and volunteers from the Puppy Mill Project often work at booths at community events to get the word out about pet stores and puppy mills.

### **Credits:**

The Puppy Mill Project

Cari Meyers is more than a little shell shocked that she came out on top of the [America Inspired](#) voting for the [Leadership](#) category. Thanks to strong support from her own organization and animal rescue groups around the country, the founder of [the Puppy Mill Project](#), an advocacy group that educates consumers about puppy mills and their connection to pet stores, has won a \$10,000 prize for her non-profit group.

"I'm in shock and this just hasn't sunk in. I just never thought we had the chance to win this one," says Meyers. "When you look at the people that were in the top five in each category, it was such an honor to be considered. I'm thrilled and excited that I've won. But, I find it hard to accept that I've accomplished so much when I see how far we have to go and how much more we have to do."

### **Distemper outbreaks**

For once, puppy mill dogs sold in pet stores are actually leading the news in Chicago during the past week. All because of distemper outbreaks among puppies sold by Happiness is Pets (HIP) in Naperville, Downers Grove and Arlington Heights. As of yesterday, Kathleen Summers of the Humane Society of the United States said that there were six confirmed cases and three awaiting results.. ([See original story.](#))

"Nobody pays attention until something big happens. It's heartbreaking that these puppies had to get sick and die for television and newspapers to become interested in this story," says Meyers. "I wonder why no reporters are asking more questions about how dogs get from the puppy mills to the store. Brokers go to the mills, load 40 to 50 puppies in a truck and drive them to the pet stores. Few people realize that 40 percent of the dogs die before they get to the store."

The HSUS became involved after Bryan Phillips filed a complaint when the Dachshund he purchased, Dakota, was diagnosed with distemper. The highly contagious and deadly disease is also very preventable when dogs have been vaccinated. HIP presented documents that Dakota was up to date on shots. ([See story.](#))

"The vet has said that she has stabilized for now and it looks like she is out of danger for the short term," Phillips told me via email. "She is a stubborn little dog and I think it's paying off for her. As she has started to recover, the vet has also told me Dakota is probably younger than the records state, I'm doubting the validity of all of her paperwork."

### **Public Education**

Other families haven't been so lucky as their dogs have either died or been euthanized as they became more ill. After Phillips dog became sick, he's done a lot of homework and legwork to find out more about pet shop dogs. Meyers says that is why the prize money for her organization is so important. She wants to work on more programs to educate the public so that fewer families will be pulled in by the puppies in the window.

"What this story has illustrated is that the consumer isn't protected at all in a case like this," says Meyers. "Winning contests and doing protests and standing at booths at pet fairs are all well in good when it comes to getting the word out. But, we need stronger laws to protect the animals and the consumers. The fraud in this industry is so multi-layered that the consumers need better protection."

### **Weekend protests**

In the meantime, her organization will be staging two protests this weekend to build awareness. On Saturday, they will be [protesting](#) between 1 to 3 p.m. at the Collar and Leash at 1435 N. Wells in Chicago. Then on Sunday, her organization will be [protesting](#) at Happiness is Pets at 1592 West Ogden in Naperville between 1 to 3 p.m.

### **For more information**

To learn more about the Puppy Mill Project, go [online](#) to learn about [volunteering](#), the [Illinois Pet Shop Disclosure Act](#), [where pet stores purchase their puppies](#) and [where to find a dog](#). You may also follow them on [Facebook](#).

*Do you volunteer or work for a shelter or rescue that has programs you'd like to promote? Do you work in a pet-related business that has an interesting story to tell. If so, contact me at [kathypetexam@gmail.com](mailto:kathypetexam@gmail.com). Enjoy this article? Receive email alerts when new articles become available. Just click on the subscribe button above. You may also follow me on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) or read my [blog](#).*

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