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Puppy mill opponents stage protest in Peru

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As car horns honked and posters waved in the wind, a group of protesters Sunday attempted to speak on behalf of voiceless animals living in inhumane conditions.

An estimated 150 people gathered on the edge of Peru Mall parking lot in opposition to puppy mills and the pet stores that sell the litters of dogs produced in those facilities, particularly Furry Babies which has a store in the mall.

"I think if this happens enough, I think, people have to listen and have to realize there's something worth checking into," said Kim Glover of Ottawa.

A recent NewsTribune investigation found that many of the dogs sold at Furry Babies were bred in facilities that were licensed but often violated USDA standards.

Glover was standing alongside her longtime friend Kim Diss of Grand Ridge. The friends said they have been opposed to the puppy mill model of dog breeding for quite a while and Diss recently took part in a similar public protest against Furry Babies' Fox Valley mall location.

The term "puppy mill" is commonly used to indicate breeding facilities, often containing large numbers of dogs, where the dogs are kept in poor conditions and forced to continually breed for the purpose of producing litters to meet the demands of pet store and online animal sales.

The puppies produced in such conditions can appear well-cared for even though the breeding dogs have often been found to suffer from a disturbing list of injuries and ailments. Occasionally, as the NewsTribune investigation also found, the poor quality of the breeding facilities leads to the puppies suffering from health problems.

Glover and Diss said they hope to educate people one person at a time, if necessary, on the issue and possibly catch the attention of someone in a position of political power, who can push for changes in the accepted standards of animal care.

"It doesn't hurt to get out here and let people how we feel and it's obvious there's a lot of people who feel the same way," Glover said.

Tracy Ross of La Salle, who organized the protest, said she hoped to surround the mall with protesters. While they may not have been shoulder-to-shoulder, the protesters were able to spread around the perimeter of the mall parking lot with the exception of the eastern edge along Route 251, which was considered too dangerous. At any time over the three hours the protest took place there were as many as 70 people participating.

If honking car horns and thumbs-up can be counted as measures of support, the protesters' message was well received by passing motorists, although there were a couple of passersby who yelled obscenities and offered less-supportive hand gestures.

The protesters were prepared for such a situation, returning the anger with friendliness.

Prior to lining up along the parking lot perimeter, Heidi Milner of Peru advised the protesters on where they were allowed to stand and how to handle any opposition comments.



Anti-puppy mill protesters, including Suzanne Halm (from left) of Standard, Andy Gaylord of Ladd, Mitch Bauman of Plainfield, Sammy, a 4-year-old Samoyed/Labrador, Patty Bauman of Plainfield, and Carol Gilmore of Granville, stand along Peru Mall parking lot perimeter Sunday afternoon. Roughly 150 people took part in the protest focusing on Furry Babies, located in the mall.

NewsTribune photo/Amanda Whitlock

"If someone yells something, just wave to them, blow them a kiss," she said.

Despite the efforts of those protesting out doors, there still appeared to be a steady stream of mall patrons stopping in Furry Babies to see the puppies for sale.

Milner later said she believes some of those pet store visitors may just be trying to get a closer look now that awareness of the issue is increasing.

A pair of Peru police officers were positioned near the store entrance throughout the protest in case any sparks flew inside the mall — not that they expected anything to happen.

"Any time there's a large protest it's safer to have someone stationed (nearby)," Sgt. Scott DeGroot said.
