

Pups are for Keeps, Not for Christmas

By Donna Baker

Despite educational efforts on the part of animal welfare organizations and rescue groups, the idea of a "Christmas puppy" for the kids still shows up every holiday season. Newspaper ads for pups of all breeds note "Ready for Christmas," pet stores cater to the impulse purchase mindset of holiday mall shoppers, and, perhaps most alarming, some websites now offer puppies for sale that can be purchased and shipped with just a few clicks of the mouse.

The idyllic vision of a playful, happy pup romping with the kids is soon replaced by the realities and responsibilities of caring for an animal that is not housebroken, does not understand what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior, and, in many cases, may have one or more serious health conditions due to poor breeding.

In the early days of DVGRR, relinquishing owners brought their dogs directly to the foster home that would be caring for the dog. I'll never forget the woman who sat in my dining room in early 1995, telling me as she turned over "Maddie," her three-month old Golden Retriever puppy, that "this dog is more work than my two-year-old toddler." A holiday gift turned sour, Maddie was actually luckier than most Christmas puppies - many of whom receive little attention once the "novelty" wears off and arrive in rescue nine or ten months later as rowdy, unsocialized adolescents needing lots of "rehab" before they can be successfully matched with a new home.

As each holiday season approaches, keep your ears open to friends or coworkers who start talking about "a puppy for the kids." Help them understand that adding a puppy to the household is a huge commitment that should be researched carefully and approached responsibly. Give them a copy of our puppy brochure "So You Want a Golden Retriever Puppy?" which has a great list of questions to ask yourself and a detailed checklist to help identify responsible, knowledgeable breeders (the same information is also available on our website). While tailored to Golden puppies, the brochure is just as valuable for those interested in other breeds.

Lastly, don't let yourself or others fall into the emotional trap of purchasing a pet store puppy to get him or her out of a bad situation. While this is certainly understandable from a compassionate standpoint, the sad reality is that such purchases only reinforce the demand for puppy mills to breed MORE pups who end up living in the same dismal conditions.