

Seized puppies at LAX wag way into homes

By Simone Schramm Trimm, Staff Writer

Posted: 12/21/2008 12:00:00 AM PST

Puppy auction

VAN NUYS -- When Liz Walker of Pasadena woke up Saturday morning, she had no idea she'd come home with a cute Maltese puppy named Noel.

Walker was among hundreds of people who showed up at the East Valley Animal Shelter to bid for one of 10 purebred puppies seized last month at Los Angeles International Airport from a puppy mill operating out of South Korea.

"It's for a good cause," said Walker, who bid \$5,000. "I feel like I'm helping other animals by doing this."

The puppies - five Maltese and five Yorkshire terriers - are the only survivors among 30 puppies seized after the long flight. Accompanied by falsified health certificates, the 30 puppies were found dehydrated and suffering from illnesses, officials said. Most had to be euthanized.

"What this event triggered was the recognition that we have a serious problem of animals coming in from overseas," said Ed Boks, general manager of the city's Department of Animal Services. "LAX, Border Patrol and other agencies helped make the case that the United States is the only country in the world that allows a free flow of animals over its borders without veterinary checks."

The shelter conducted the adoption auction to ensure that the puppies went to people with the financial means to take care of them.

"They're all very healthy, but we now know that there's a skin lesion on several, and one has come up positive for ringworm," said Steve Feldman, one of the Animals

Advertisement

Services veterinarians. "It's not a real serious skin problem. It's treatable, but they've all been exposed."

Boks said department personnel wanted those who got the puppies to know their pets could need veterinary treatment - not to be surprised and then return the little dogs to the shelter six months or a year from now.

Because hundreds of people showed up for the event, many other animals had a better chance at adoption.

"People are realizing that we have a lot of other animals here," said Jacob Miller, an animal-care technician. "The more people that come to the animal shelter, the more animals that are going to get adopted."

Another issue that came to light as a result of the seizure is the sale of puppy-mill dogs at pet stores. Boks announced that starting Jan. 1, his department will demand and enforce new rules for pet stores to display information on exactly where the animals came from.

According to Boks, 99 percent of dogs sold at pet stores are from puppy mills. "Angelenos need to be aware that they are encouraging a very cruel industry when they buy an animal from a puppy mill," said Boks. "The cruelty is compounded when we euthanize perfectly healthy animals in our local shelters while they spend \$500 for defective, sick, puppy-mill puppies."

simone.trimm@dailynews.com 818-713-3671