The Humane Society of the United States Uncovers Deception at Beverly Hills-Area Pet Store to the Stars

Employees routinely hide the truth about the origin of the store’s puppies and the health of the animals

LOS ANGELES (Dec. 11, 2007) – An investigation of Pets of Bel Air, an upscale pet boutique on the edge of Beverly Hills, reveals that employees routinely deceive customers, including a roster of entertainment-industry celebrities, by falsely claiming that all puppies sold at the store are raised by private breeders and that they don’t use puppy mills. In fact, HSUS investigators uncovered evidence that many of the puppies sold at Pets of Bel Air come from puppy mills -- factory-like operations where the dogs are kept in barren cages and treated like production machines -- in the Midwest, including Arkansas, Kansas and Oklahoma.

Wayne Pacelle, the president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States, unveiled the results of the undercover investigation at a press conference at Los Angeles Animal Services. A six-minute video report chronicling the months-long investigation is posted at humanesociety.org.

The HSUS reviewed records documenting at least 28 commercial breeders in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma supplying Pets of Bel Air with puppies. HSUS undercover investigators also visited five of the suppliers that store management insists are “private breeders” and not “puppy mills.” Each of those five locations, investigators discovered, are actually mass-breeding operations that house 100 to 300 dogs.

State and federal inspection reports examined by HSUS investigators reveal that some of Pets of Bel Air breeder/dealers have been routinely cited for their failure to comply with animal-welfare regulations, including inaccurate or non-existent recordkeeping, inadequate shelter from the elements, rusted, filthy and overcrowded cages, leaky roofs, feces-encrusted runs, filthy food bowls and, at one Missouri puppy mill, a leaking waste disposal system that “allows the waste to flow out onto the ground and on other animals.” Two of the breeders did not have a USDA license, which is required for commerical breeding operations that sell puppies to pet stores.

“Even the trendiest, most upscale pet stores sell puppies from puppy mills,” Pacelle said. “No consumer is immune to the lies and deceit. It doesn’t matter who you are or where you shop. This investigation shows that a high-price and prestigious address are no assurance of a dog from a reputable breeder.”

The HSUS investigation, which took place earlier this year inside Pets of Bel Air and at several of the Midwestern puppy mills that supply the store, reveals that Pets of Bel Air employees are encouraged by management to be dishonest with patrons about the animals’ origins and medical conditions. Employees deny, for example, that dogs come from puppy mills. - and when puppies in the store are sick, Pets of Bel Air employees routinely downplay and distort the seriousness of their illness.
Pets of Bel Air employees stated that Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Denise Richards, Demi Moore and Robin Williams are among the store’s celebrity clientele. In addition to selling puppies and other animals, the boutique also sells pet supplies and offers grooming services.

Ed Boks, general manager of Los Angeles Animal Services, joined Pacelle in calling on people to adopt from shelters and not patronize pet stores that sell puppies. Pets of Bel Air is also out of compliance with city licensing requirements, according to Boks.

“Los Angeles Animal Services has wonderful dogs of all shapes and sizes just waiting for a loving home,” said Boks. “The rich and famous who patronize Pets of Bel Air instead of adopting dogs from animal shelters are sending the wrong message that pet store puppies are worth their high price tags.”

Author and philanthropist Jana Kohl rescued her dog Baby from a California puppy mill. Kohl and Baby were also on hand for the press conference. Baby’s vocal chords were cut by the puppy mill operator, and she lost a leg due to the harsh treatment she received during her years as a breeder.

The HSUS has been working to stop these cruel enterprises, using the courts, the legislative process, undercover investigations, and public-awareness campaigns. Last month, another HSUS investigation threw a spotlight on a shocking puppy mill problem in Virginia, rescuing hundreds of dogs from a single operation.

Facts:

- Adopting from an animal shelter, where one out of every four dogs is a purebred, or from a purebred rescue group, can help stop the puppy mill business.
- Mills contribute to millions of unwanted dogs euthanized each year in the U.S.
- About 2,500 of the nation's 9,000 pet stores sell puppies.
- The HSUS estimates 2 million to 4 million puppy mill puppies are sold annually in the U.S.
- Mill puppies are more likely to have severe health problems, genetic defects and behavioral issues.
- Documented puppy mill conditions include over-breeding, inbreeding, minimal veterinary care, poor food and shelter, crowded cages and lack of socialization.
- Dogs kept for breeding in puppy mills suffer for years and are bred as often as possible before they are killed, sold through auction like used cars or abandoned.
- Pet stores and unscrupulous breeders use attractive websites to hide the truth and to dupe the public into thinking that they are dealing with a reputable breeder.
- Reputable breeders never sell puppies over the Internet or through a pet store. They will insist on meeting the family who wants to buy the dog.

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The Humane Society of the United States is the nation’s largest animal protection organization—backed by 10 million Americans, or one of every 30. For more than a half-century, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education, and hands-on programs. Celebrating animals and confronting cruelty—on the web at humansociety.org.