

Puppy Auctions

**By Morgan Lance
Marin Humane Society**

What goes together better than kids and dogs? There is an undeniable magic in the bond between a child and their beloved pet. Some people are willing to pay big money to buy such magic. Some well-meaning non-profits are even willing to capitalize on that fact by attempting to auction off that kind of magic. Some of those non-profits are schools right here in Marin County.

Auctions are a common means of fundraising for most private and some public schools in Marin County and elsewhere in the Bay Area. Schools look for donations or "good buys" on high profile items that can be auctioned at fundraising events each spring. Common auction items included artwork, airline tickets, and weekend getaways. Occasionally schools offer even more irresistible items like "Adorable Golden Retriever Puppies" along with the other auction showpieces. The puppies sell for hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars to the parents of children at the school. The school makes money, the kids get a new puppy, and the parents get the satisfaction of believing they did a good thing.

What's wrong with this picture? Everything! NorCal Golden Retriever Rescue recently began to investigate the source of the Golden Retriever pups popping up on auction lists at schools and non-profits throughout the Bay Area. What they discovered is that many of those pups came from out-of-state large scale breeders who sold their animals over the internet, couldn't provide proper veterinary records, and didn't give the buyer an opportunity to meet the breed stock which produced the puppy. In other words - puppy mills. Though the schools most likely did not realize their suppliers were puppy mills, they were unwittingly supporting this cruel industry.

Puppy mills have been around for decades and are still legal businesses in many states. Basic qualifications of a puppy mill include large numbers of dogs living in inhumane conditions, receiving little or no veterinary care, eating substandard foods and having little to no interaction with humans. In a recent puppy mill raid in the South Bay, Humane Officers discovered hundreds of small dogs living in rabbit hutches. Many had lacerations on their skin from a life spent living on wire. Others had illnesses ranging from heartworm to mange. All had suffered years of neglect as breeders who's job it was to produce puppies to be sold to pet stores and internet suppliers.

Over the past few years, The Marin Humane Society learned of both private and public school foundations in our county who were intending to sell puppies at their fundraising auction. Through the education efforts of The Marin Humane Society and Norcal Golden Retriever Rescue, and pressure from parents at the school, most of the puppies were withdrawn from the auction. Some of the puppies intended for sale have been from private breeders - not puppy mills. This fact, however, raises further concerns, as any reputable breeder who cared about their puppies would never allow them to be sold at auction. Reputable breeders are concerned for the welfare of their puppies and screen potential buyers carefully -something that can't be done when the pup simply goes to the highest bidder. They are also concerned for the overall reputation of the breed. The fact that a dog, once sold at auction, is no

longer eligible for AKC registration is something that would prevent most breeders from ever supplying their pups for this type of sale.

The life of an animal is valuable and precious. It isn't something to be purchased on a whim. Yet that is exactly what happens at school auctions each spring. Despite the fact that the California Education Code 233.5 requires schools to "promote kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures," some Bay Area schools are promoting a much different ethic by allowing animals to be sold at their fundraising events. All non-profit agencies search for creative ways to fund their very worthy causes. Certainly the education of children in our community is among the most worthy causes of all. However, the State of California says that our education system should teach more than just the "Three Rs". Indeed, there is a fourth "R" that is equally important and that one stands for "Respect." Research has shown that children who are taught respect for all life forms tend to mature into adults who are kind, compassionate, and respectful of others. By refusing to sell animals at auction, schools in Marin County can show children that they also believe that all life deserves respect.