

Entertainment
School News
Letters to Santa

Religion
Seniors
Youth Page

living IN THE HILLS

Pets as Christmas presents often abandoned

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT

The Herald

If you intend to give someone a pet for Christmas, consider that although your intentions may be good, the outcome for pets is often not.

Nothing can be more exciting for Christmas than a warm, cuddly, adorable puppy or a fluffy, playful kitten if the person receiving the animal wants, and is prepared to take care of it.

If the receiver doesn't, he or she may not get past the fact that puppies and kittens make a mess, whine, can be constantly under foot and, especially puppies, require a lot of attention and training.

If that person doesn't want to

bother, what happens to the animal?

That's what the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPAC) and a local veterinarian is asking Christmas gift-givers to consider this holiday season.

"Every year, numerous pets are given as Christmas presents and every year, many of these animals are deposited at the local animal shelter a day or two after Christmas," said Glenn Perrett, the publications coordinator for the OSPCA.

Heather White, the education coordinator for the Oakville Humane Society, said there's always an increase in the number of

animals dropped off at the shelter around Christmas time.

"We receive at least 15 to 20 animals after Christmas because people got them for gifts and didn't want them," she said.

All kinds of animals are dropped off from puppies to gerbils.

In their press release, OSPCA said there are several reasons why pets do not usually make good Christmas gifts.

"Often the recipient does not even want a pet," said Mr. Perrett. "Even if they do, chances are the person wants to choose his or her own animal and if not involved in the selection process, may be disappointed."

For example, if a person had his heart set on a large breed, he could be really disappointed if presented with a toy breed.

Another important consideration is having a pet often means a long commitment.

"Depending on the age of the animal, the owner may be responsible for the pet's well-being for up to 15 years," stated the press release. "If the dog is given to a teenager, who will look after the animal if the teenager decides to go to university?"

Dr. Stephen Hess, a veterinarian at the Acton Veterinary Clinic agrees that gift-givers should carefully consider the consequences before giving a pet as a Christmas gift.

"Beyond the cuteness, furriness and appeal of a pet, one has to consider who the receiver is and if that person is prepared to take on the responsibility of caring for a pet," said Dr. Hess.

"If the person doesn't want it, they can't stuff it away like an ugly lamp. A pet needs to be fed, cared for and trained."

He recommends that if a pet is to be given, it might be best for the receiver to know it's coming.

"It may take the excitement out

of giving but the reward of making sure the receiver wants and is ready for a pet is worth it," said Dr. Hess.

Another way to ensure that the receiver gets exactly the type, breed, color and temperament of pet they want, is to give the person a card saying they'll get a pet and leave it to them to choose the pet, suggests Dr. Hess.

Unwanted pets in Halton Hills are usually dropped off at Halton Hills Animal Control in Limehouse or the Oakville Humane Society.

Ms. White said animals dropped off at the humane society are usually kept there until re-adopted

which can take up to half a year. This bothers her because the rejected animals can sustain emotional damage from the experience.

"For puppies and kittens, the first six months of their life is a critical time when they need lots of social contact," she said. "In a shelter, they don't always get that and it can lead to behavioral problems."

The message to all who are considering giving a pet as a gift, is that the person who receives an unwanted pet will only be inconvenienced or disappointed, while it's the animal that pays the biggest price.



Acton Veterinary Clinic technician Annette Tancoo and veterinarian Dr. Stephen Hess hold up 'Pork-chop', one of the many abandoned and rejected cats he takes in to the clinic to nurse back to health. He said, often animals which are given as Christmas pets are abandoned and urges anyone to give careful consideration before deciding to give someone a pet for Christmas. (Herald Photo)



John Reeve, owner of Leathertown Feed and Pet Supply store on Mill St. in Acton has low-maintenance pets for sale this season such as a Peruvian Guinea Pig and Cockatiels. He doesn't sell a lot of pets at Christmas except for budgies which is fine with him because he, like other animal lovers, is concerned about how well some pets fare when given as Christmas presents. (Herald Photo)

Keep your pet away from sweets

By LISA BOONSTOPPEL-POT

The Herald

Chocolate! It's only sweet and fattening for humans but for pets, it's often deadly.

During the holiday season, many people celebrate with candy, cake and chocolate and fill their homes with Christmas decorations all perfectly safe for people, but often dangerous for pets.

Dr. Stephen Hess, a veterinarian with the Acton Veterinary Clinic says Christmas time is a "dangerous time to have a young animal."

Every year, he gets a chocolate poisoning case where a pet consumes a large amount of chocolate, which can have a toxic affect on the animal.

Other yearly problems he sees are animals who've ingested ornaments or tinsel from Christmas trees.

"One year we had an animal who ate a marshmallow filled with pins which had been used to decorate a Christmas tree," he recalls. "We had to operate on the animal to save its life."

The Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (OSPAC) states in a press release that pet owners should also be aware of how many other treats, such as cookies and candies, a pet consumes because it can cause diarrhea and lead to gastrointestinal upsets.

As well, some common holiday Christmas plants are toxic to pets.

Three of the more common are the poinsettia and the berries of the holly and mistletoe. Often cats will find these plants enticing, but if they are eaten, they can cause severe vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain.

Family important at Christmas

By KATHY TAYLOR

F.C.E.

The Christmas season is fast approaching with decorating, shopping, bright lights, and carols playing everywhere.

This year make Christmas extra special for you and your family by making your own traditions. Set aside some time to spend with your children.

Take a walk exploring the lights in your neighbourhood. Make a Christmas card together. Perhaps bake a gingerbread

house or some cookies. Make a gift for someone on your list. Bundle up nice and warm and make angels in the snow.

Christmas is the season that seems to bring all mankind together, because Christmas brings out the kid in all of us.

Kathy Taylor is an F.C.E. teacher, and is the teacher at the Georgetown Parent-Child Centre. She is the mother of one and enjoys children. The Parent-Child Centre is located at 89 Mountainview Rd. South/873-2960.

T.V. Ontario visits the Herald

Halton Hills protest group POWER got more than local coverage at a protest Monday. They were filmed by TV Ontario to be part of a series called Waste Not.

Protect Our Environment and Water Resources (POWER) was protesting the Acton dump when Premier Bob Rae came to town Monday to open a business and TV Ontario filmed the entire event from placard making to the dispersal.

Of the 13 shows in the Waste Not series, approximately six will focus on how a grass-roots protest groups

gets started and remains effective, said series host and cameraman, David Stringer.

"We followed the mechanism behind a protest and talked to them about their strategy and then filmed the actual event," he explained.

After the protest, Mr. Stringer and reporter Keith Lennox interviewed Halton Hills Herald political reporter Ben Dummett to get his comments on how a protest group can effectively reach the media.

"When someone starts a group,

they need to deal with politicians and the press and we talked to Mr. Dummett to find out how they can best do that," said Mr. Stringer.

The remaining episodes of the series will focus on recycling and re-using, he said.

"This is kind of a guide for people at home who wonder what to put in their blue box, what happens to the stuff and what to do with their waste around home."

The two have been working on the series since August and it will begin airing in March.



Halton Hills political reporter Ben Dummett was filmed and interviewed by TV Ontario reporters Keith Lennox (left) and David Stringer (right) Dec. 9 as part of their series on Waste Not, an environmental guide. TV Ontario was in town to cover the POWER protest at Mold masters and came to the Herald to discuss how environmental groups can effectively reach the media. (Herald Photo)

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