

Adding A Furry Friend To The Family

Thinking of adding a pet to the family this holiday season? Before rushing out to find that special friend, first make sure that this decision is not made in haste or because it seems like a good idea for a “present”. Remember that young animals will eventually grow out of their “small and cute” phase, and they may grow to a large size. Do you have room in your home and time to handle an animal? Are you willing to train the pet (if it’s a dog) so that he/she understands boundaries and is able to live in harmony with your family? You are ideally bringing this pet into the home for the rest of his or her life, and it should be a family decision, not a surprise.

If you’re sure the time is right, there are lots of places to find the right pet for you, especially if your choice is a dog or a cat.

Traditionally, many people purchased their pet from a pet store; however, consumers would do well to research these local outlets, since it is known that most of the cats and dogs for sale in pet stores come from large scale, out-of-state puppy mills (see http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/?credit=web_id83584718 for more information about puppy mills).

Early last year, seventeen pet stores in the state were cited for multiple violations of New Jersey’s Pet Purchase Protection Law by the New Jersey Department of Consumer Affairs (http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2016/01/dozens_of_nj_pet_shops_cited_in_state_crackdown.html). In addition, puppy store chain Just Pups’ owner, Vincent LoSacco, has gone from having four stores in New Jersey to one store as he faces multiple animal cruelty charges and health code violations (<http://archive.northjersey.com/news/case-of-just-pups-owner-vincent-losacco-drags-on-1.1675876>). His store in East Brunswick was closed down in February after three dead puppies were found in the freezer (<http://patch.com/new-jersey/warren/s/fmqi4/three-dead-dogs-found-in-freezer-of-pet-store-njspca-says>). And, in late December 2015, a pet store owner in Woodbridge was charged with cruelty (<http://newjersey.news12.com/news/fancy-pups-in-woodbridge-closed-down-owner-rocco-garruto-charged-with-animal-cruelty-1.11274554>).

An alternative to buying from a pet store is to adopt from a shelter or rescue group. Shelters and rescue groups have many pets to choose from, and they are more than happy to match up a potential adopter with the animal that is right for their home in terms of personality, activity level, compatibility with other animals and children, and special needs/care. Some local shelters to consider are: the Associated Humane Society in Tinton Falls, the Old Bridge Animal Shelter in Old Bridge, and the Monmouth County SPCA in Eatontown. Locally we have Rescue Ridge, and Castle of Dreams Animal Rescue. There are many others around the state and all can be found online. Another excellent resource is Petfinder.com: <https://www.petfinder.com/>

If you still can’t find the pet your heart desires and you have a specific breed in mind, research the reputable breeders in your area. A reputable breeder is one that will welcome a visitor to his/her property to see the conditions in which the cats or dogs live. A reputable breeder will readily show a prospective purchaser the mother and father of a litter. Most importantly, a reputable breeder will never broker their animals to be sold by a pet store or other intermediary;

they sell their animals directly from their residence, and the transaction is always face-to-face. Useful information for finding a reputable breeder can be found at this link: http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/puppy_mills/tips/finding_responsible_dog_breeder.html

If you do find yourself visiting a pet store, do yourself (and the animals in it) a favor by checking to see if certain information is posted for each animal. New Jersey's Pet Purchase Protection Law requires certain information be posted on each animal's cage, such as name, street address, web address, and license numbers for each animal's breeder and broker. The cage label must also include the date and place of birth, its age, sex, and identifying markings, the date of its initial exam, and the name and address of the vet who examined it. Details of New Jersey's Pet Purchase Protection Law can be found here: <http://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/>. (Once at the website, enter *Pet Protection Act* in the Search field for law details.)

If you see a sick animal in a pet store, notify the management immediately after ascertaining that the animal has been examined by a licensed veterinarian. You should also call the local board of health or, if the town doesn't have their own board of health, the county health department.

Most of all, the search for the furry new family member should not only be informative but fun. Ideally, all family members should participate in the search if possible, to ensure that a good match is made for all. Try not to be "put off" by the number of questions during the adoption interview; the interview process is to make certain that the animal will be safe and happy in your home, which is a "win-win" for everyone. Bringing a pet into the family means it really *is* part of the family, for the rest of its life.