

New pet comes with heartbreak for family



New pet comes with heartbreak for family. The McPherson family purchased Cocoa from Georgette Kennels in Dunnville on Jan. 24. The puppy was later diagnosed with highly contagious parvovirus and is still recovering. The kennel is being investigated by the Welland Humane Society after other dogs from the same kennel died from the virus. submitted photo

Amanda Moore

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When the McPherson family lost their beloved Bernese Mountain Dog to cancer at only three years of age, they had decided that was enough. They didn't want to suffer the heartache of losing another family member.

"We didn't want to go through the pain of losing another dog," said the Suzanne Aubin-McPherson. "But we decided we needed another puppy."

Their dog pack was no longer complete and their two other canine companions missed their playmate. So Aubin-McPherson and husband Scott began looking at online puppy advertisements. The St. Ann's residents came across Georgette Kennels in Dunnville, which had Yorkie and Shih Tzu cross puppies available.

They brought Cocoa home and she instantly stole their hearts.

That night, Jan. 24, Cocoa was happily playing with the family. That was a Thursday night.

By Monday, Aubin-McPherson began to notice the puppy had diarrhea, which worsened as each day passed. By Friday, Cocoa was becoming lethargic and Aubin-McPherson brought her to the vet, who immediately suspected parvovirus — a highly contagious virus which is spread from dog to dog by direct or indirect contact with their feces.

The vet's suspicion was proven the next day when Aubin-McPherson returned with a stool sample. She was directed to the emergency veterinary clinic in Thorold.

"When I got there, they didn't have much hope," said Aubin-McPherson. "I told them, do what you can do, we don't want to lose another dog."

Three days and nearly \$2,000 later, Cocoa was back home with her family.

"It was unbelievable to get her home that night," she said.

While Cocoa is recovering, Nugget wasn't so lucky.

Ashley Webster purchased Nugget from the same Dunnville kennel as the McPhersons. The day after she brought the puppy home to her four-year-old daughter, Nugget was dead. "I saw this little guy and he was beautiful," Webster told [The Spec](#). "We brought home the puppy. By the next morning, I took him to the vet and he had to be put down."

The breeder, Georgette Landuyt, refunded the purchase price to both the McPhersons and Webster, but both don't want to see another person suffer as they have.

"I don't want other people to go out there and buy a puppy without knowing this," said Aubin-McPherson. "I want to save people from going through what we went through."

"It's heartbreaking. And we were the lucky ones. Not everyone was."

John Greer, executive director of the Welland SPCA, said an investigator is looking at the case.

"It's still ongoing, so I can't comment on an ongoing case," Greer said. He did, however, confirm he had one more call to his office Wednesday.

On Feb. 5, Greer said an investigation could take up to two or three weeks. "If it is parvo, that's a deadly disease. We would put the entire area in quarantine."

Greer said his office would like to hear from anyone who has had recent problems with Georgette Kennels. The Welland SPCA can be reached at 1-888-222-0568.

[In an interview with The Spec](#) Feb. 5, Landuyt insisted "everything was good" at her kennel.

The 86-year-old said she had about 60 dogs in her care and was providing the necessary shots to the puppies herself.

While many breeders take their puppies to a veterinarian for their shots, including one for parvovirus, Landuyt administers the shots herself. Common practice is for a puppy to have its first shot at six to eight weeks.

Cocoa was about six-and-a-half weeks old when the McPhersons brought her home.

Melissa Carlaw, a spokesperson for the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association, told [The Spec](#) there are no regulations preventing breeders from administering shots themselves.

"If you own the animals, you can administer anything you want."

By eight weeks, puppies should have received their first set of shots. The typical vaccine is a combination that protects against four canine viruses: distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza and parvo.

Aubin-McPherson has learned a lot from this experience.

"I'd make sure the puppy was at least 10 weeks old, has had its shots and is vet checked," she said. "She's a breeder. We thought she knew and we just fell in love with the puppy right away."

— *With files from The Spectator*

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