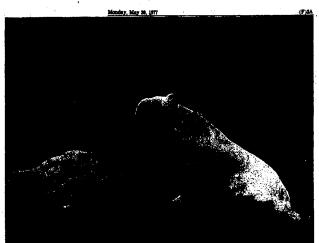Mother Dawn, a golden retriever owned by Debbie Fulton who works at Dog Gone Acres, nuzzles one of her 4-day-old pups. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)

Jan Muzzarelli, who breeds English-bred golden retrievers like these, admires the family portrait of Dawn nursing her pups while Uncle Chad, Ms. Muz- zarelli's golden retriever and brother to the pups father, plays the role of proud papa.

Public ignorance responsible

Backyard breeding prompts population boom

By LYNN ORR

The general public puts more care into shopping for a car they may have for five years than a family pet they may have for 10 years.

That's the opinion of Farmington Hills resident Jan Muzzarelli, who's been breeding and raising Golden Retrievers for 15 years at Dog Gone Acres on Middlebelt.

"People decide they want a Mark IV or a Pinto and they shop around discriminately for price, service and warranty. But they buy a puppy because it's cute, without wondering how it will fit into their family situation," Ms. Muzzarelli claims. "A dog will be part of the family and should suit the family's lifestyle—but most people don't stop and think about what you should look for in a dog."

And the public's ignorance of dog breeders, as well as naivete about the responsibilities of owning a family pet, has led to a overpopulation of pets and roaming packs of dogs, she contends.

"After the novelty wears off, people don't care about their pets and let

them run," says Dorothy Lambert, a dog groomer at Pets 'N Particulars, a Farmington pet store whose manager adamantly refuses to sell pure-bred dogs.

"If they did away with dogs in pet shops, it would force people to go to breeders who know their business, and the public would know what they're getting," says Ms. Lambert.

Shop manager Donna Bibeau agrees.

"USUALLY franchised pet shops get their dogs from puppy mill farms where females are bred every season and the puppies are fed and conditioned with a minimum of expense," she says.

The puppy mill farms were started by Midwest pig farmers who found it was more profitable to raise puppies. Distinguishable from reliable dog breeders, the farmers know little about dogs, Ms. Bibeau explains.

"Eight-week old puppies are shipped off and passed off in pet stores as breeders. And people can pay an enormous price for registered female dogs on the pretense that she's breeding stock.

"Then the owner discovers no reputable breeder will service the bitch."

Ms. Muzzarelli discovered such a case recently when an owner brought in a female Golden Retriever for stud service. Ms. Muzzarelli agreed to allow her male dog to service the female if the following criteria could be checked out.

"The hips have to be X-rayed and the dog has to be checked for antropia son who registered the dog. When I tary), I said I would contact the perinverted eyelids which are heridididid. I discovered that the dog's papers were incorrect—the dog was the product of a mother-son combination, so I refused to allow the stud service.

"That owner probably found someone who would service his dog, but indiscriminate breeding is part of the whole dog problem."

"The American Kennel Club registration is only as good as the person who signs it," she says.

Ms. Bibeau agrees and contends a reliable breeder will stand behind the dogs he sells.

"A breeder's responsibility is to in-

form the buyer about the dog—temperment, care, and how it will fit into the particular family situation."

A Golden Retriever sells for around $200, says Muzzarelli, and she stands behind the quality of the dogs she sells.

"If a puppy develops a hip problem, I'll pay the purchase price toward corrective surgery," she says. "Most breeders offer to trade the dog, but a family doesn't want to trade a dog that's become a family pet."

WHEN Ms. Muzzarelli walked down the street 15 years ago with a Golden Retriever, people would ask "What kind of dog is that?" But whenever a breed becomes popular, backyard or indiscriminate breeding occurs and legitimate dog breeders begin seeing problems in certain breeds.

"Since there's been a big demand for, Goldens (encouraged by the publicity of President Gerald Ford's Liberty), we've seen a change in temperment. The idea of breeding is to hold the standard or improve it, but most people don't know enough about dogs

and buy a dog that's a 'pure-bred,' which doesn't mean it holds the standards of the legitimate breeder."

"Leave the breeding to the breeders" is Ms. Bibeau's advice. "A dedicated breeder studies the bloodline for 20-30 years, and an ethical breeder will euthanize dogs with problems. But people often don't know what they're getting today."

The popularity of the cockapoo (a supposedly "pure-bred" mixture of the cocker spaniel and poodle) is a good example of how the public gets taken, she adds.

"Cockapoos are abundant and cheap—people think they're getting something, but actually they're getting a mixed breed."

And often what pet stores pass off as cocka-poos have more in common with Heinz (mixed) dogs or mutts.

"With a pure-bred dog, the breeder pretty much knows what the puppies will look like when grown—he knows the size, temperment, and coat of the dog. With a mixed breed, you don't

know what kind of genes will pop up."

Overpopulation enters the picture because moms and dads want their dog to have a litter to amuse or educate their children in biology.

"Then they get dumped on our doorstep or somewhere else," Ms. Bibeau says. Various plans to control expanding animal populations don't hit the target she adds.

"Because breeders are registered, city government finds it's the easiest place to start—by slapping fines on breeders who wouldn't think of letting their dogs run loose. Registered dogs are a very small percentage of those dogs destroyed every year.

Ms. Lambert believes enforcing current laws could handle some of the problem

"If they would spot-check areas where packs of dogs gather, especially in the mornings they would see what dogs are running loose and making a nuisance of themselves."

Pets 'N. Particulars dog groomer Sue Chepaska gives this poodle a nail clip and a shearing for the summer season.