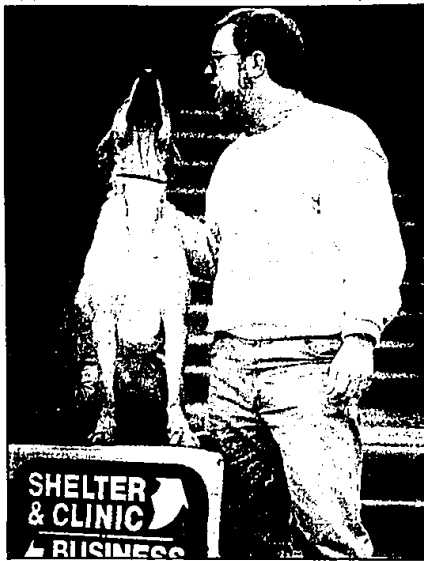




Furry little kittens at the Auburn Hills humane society shelter are looking for homes but the animals soon will grow into cats,

which require family time and affection, as well as food, water and shelter.



Buddy, a 1-year-old Golden Retriever/Labrador mix, cranes his neck as Humane Society executive director Gary Tiscornia gives him a scratch. Buddy is an example of a long-shot adoption, Tiscornia said. The dog is neutered, handles well on a leash and "is lovable," Tiscornia said, but he is a year old and most people are looking for pups.

Give a puppy a break — don't give a puppy as a gift

By Helen Niemiec
staff writer

Everyone encourages clothing, jewelry or scents as holiday gifts, but cuddly puppies or furry kittens are another matter.

The Michigan Humane Society feels strongly that animals should NOT be given as gifts — especially surprise gifts. One veterinarian agrees, even though he gave his daughter a kitten at Christmas and said her joy was "heartwarming."

Everyone agrees pets make great companions. Michigan Humane Society executive director Gary Tiscornia said he can't fault the motivation of the gift-giver.

"These people are trying to give a gift of love and what is more lovable than a cute, little critter? But giving pets is not a real good idea, either for the recipient or the pet," Tiscornia said.

A PET, Tiscornia said, is a 10 to 15 year commitment and both pet and owner should have complementary temperaments and personalities. The match is impossible to achieve by a third party, he said.

Alexander Byron, a Southfield veterinarian, said surprising someone with a pet for the holidays is a bad idea but he doesn't rule out pets as gifts, under very strict conditions.

He gave his daughter a kitten for Christmas four years ago, but knew that he and his family wanted a pet anyway.

"When my daughter woke up, she heard the meowing and the look on her face was heartwarming. But we didn't get the kitten just to see the look on her face," Byron said. "We made a long-term commitment to care for this pet."

Buying a family pet as a holiday present is one thing but Byron said buying a surprise puppy or kitten for a friend is an outrageous idea.

"THEY'RE NOT toasters. You can't return them just because you made a mistake," Byron said. "I would say that the only time to buy a pet for a friend is if they very specifically indicated their desire and advises the donor about the breed and other specifics."

Dan Tilt, owner of World of Pets in West Bloomfield, said buyers should not think that birds require less care or attention than puppies and kittens, even though some see them as lower maintenance selections.

"Birds like a lot of attention and the more the handled, the more they interact," Tilt said. "If you get a bird, put it in a cage and leave it in a corner, you don't get the full benefit of the bird's personality."

Fish, Tilt said, require less care: feeding once a day and changing the water once a month. "But there is more to a fish tank than just fish and water," Tilt said. "We explain to customers what is involved."

Larger birds, such as parrots and macaws, are not recommended for first time bird buyers. They need a

higher level of care and have strong beaks that can destroy items or injure fingers if the bird isn't handled correctly, Tilt said.

Better bird choices for children and young adults are parakeets or cockatiels, because they enjoy interacting with humans.

"Tame birds have such wonderful personalities," Tilt said. Finches and canaries, Tilt added, are basically ornamental and do not interact much with humans.

Birds are becoming increasingly popular because they are "beautiful and relaxing" and are becoming more common sights in restaurants and office buildings.

THE HUSTLE OF the holiday season makes it next to impossible to provide sufficient time and a safe environment to acclimate to a new puppy or kitten, he added.

Extension cords, glass ornaments and poisonous holly plants are all potential hazards to steer young animals away from. And, Tiscornia said, with parties and visits, the recipient may not have adequate time to bond with the pet.

House training, teaching commands and setting up an exercise routine also require time.

The house also should be ready for a pet, Byron said, with proper food, toys and other needs met before the young animal moves in.

Pups need more bonding time than

kittens or birds, but Byron said all pets need time to become acquainted with their adoptive family and new digs.

"PUPPIES ARE more social and they need to identify quickly with their new pack, the family: The new puppy owner needs to make a time commitment of at least six months to allow the pet to adjust," Byron said.

Leaving for a holiday party and being away for several hours will not affect a kitten or bird as much as a pup, Byron warned. A puppy look-

ing for its family either will try to escape its confined area or will chew or destroy things out of frustration.

If you want to give a friend or relative a pet, Tiscornia suggested that the donor take the friend to the Humane Society or other pet source, rather than choose one for them.

The Humane Society doesn't stop its adoption program during the holidays, though Tiscornia said the screening process is "very heavy" in December.

"WE DO THAT for the sake of the owner, as well as the sake of the animal. If someone is adopting an animal as a gift or for small children, we may not allow the adoption to be finalized until after the holidays," Tiscornia said. "We don't want to see critters returned the second week of January."

The shelter does see an increase in animals dropped off in January, though the overwhelming majority comes from pet stores, breeders or neighborhood litters. The screening process, Tiscornia said, cuts down on shelter returns "because we tell the people exactly what they're getting into."

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police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

● ROBBERY ATTEMPT AND ASSAULT REPORTED

A 30-year-old Detroit man escaped serious injury after he stopped to help whom he believed was a stranded woman motorist. The motorist and an accomplice then attacked him and tried to rob him on westbound I-696 early Friday morning, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

The man told police he was driving on I-696, near Haggerty, when he saw a woman near a car pulled over on the shoulder with the hood up. When the woman flagged him down, he stopped.

"Please can you help me? My car broke down," the woman told the Detroit resident, who said he would call police. "No. Can you help me?" the woman asked.

The man noticed the woman had a small, chrome-plated revolver pointed at him. "Get out of the damn car," the woman said. He got out and at gunpoint walked to the back of the car.

The Detroit resident then noticed a man standing by what was thought to be the stranded car, a 1974 Pontiac. The man had a non-folding hunting knife in his hand. "Give me all your money," the man reportedly said.

The Detroit resident kicked the woman in the stomach, causing her to fall to the ground. When her accomplice began to struggle with the man he hit him in the face. The man then began waving his knife and cut the Detroit resident on his hand and wrist.

As the Detroit resident ran to his car he felt the knife cut his right arm. He still managed to get into his car, drive across the freeway median to Botsford General Hospital, where he received 16 stitches.

● ROBBERY REPORTED

A 38-year-old Detroit man was at the Farmington Auto Wash on Eight Mile, Saturday when two men, one whom he knew from previous years, asked him for a ride. That ride resulted in a chain of events that ended with the Detroit man being robbed of \$170, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

When the men got into the Detroit resident's car, one of the men aimed a revolver on him and told him to drive. The trio drove around for awhile and eventually ended up in Detroit, near Grand River and Westbrook.

When they stopped the two unidentified men told the Detroit resident's pants, containing \$170 cash and his jacket. The two also dropped the man's car keys down the sewer.

● MAILBOXES SMASHED

Two mailboxes at separate houses on Fredricksburg were smashed Nov. 21, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

One of the two mailboxes also was knocked over. Damage was estimated to each of the mailboxes as less than \$100.

● CAR FIRE

A car parked behind Botsford General Hospital received an estimated \$2,500 in damage after it caught fire Nov. 19, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.

When firefighters arrived they

found a small fire under the left side of the car's dash board. The fire was believed to have been caused by a short circuit.

● HOUSE FIRE

Damage was estimated at \$5,000 when a house on Wildwood Trail caught fire Nov. 21, three weeks after the homeowner installed insulation in the attic, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.

Firefighters found heat damage around a light fixture and the ceiling. Firefighters removed the ceiling and checked the attic. The owner told firefighters he had installed the insulation. The attic also had a light fixture with a 200-watt bulb. The insulation was believed to be too close to the light fixture.

● THEFTS REPORTED

A glass sculpture valued at \$12,500 was reported stolen from the Habitat Galleries on Northwestern Highway on Nov. 21.

Wireless valued at \$400 were reported stolen from a 1986 Oldsmobile at the Koala office building on Eight Mile, Nov. 22.

● BURGLARY

A night janitor, locking up the Farmington Training Center just after midnight Saturday morning,

heard what sounded like two or three kids running across the gym floor. There was no sign of forced entry, but the janitor thought a door might have been left open from somebody attending adult education classes earlier. Later, Farmington police observed that one inside door that led to the attic above the gym was pulled from its lock. A brace containing four squares to the door was pulled out.