

## Dog breeder defends conditions at kennel

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OLATHE — Nita Smith, the owner of Colorow Kennels in Olathe, said she has never run a “puppy mill,” and complaints levied against her surfaced after she relied on others to take care of her animals when injury took her away from the kennel’s operation.

The Colorado Department of Agriculture is investigating Smith’s kennel after receiving complaints about it. The results of the investigation will be disclosed next week.

Puppy mills are high-volume, sub-standard operations that may be overcrowded and hazardous to the health of the animals.

Smith said an investigator from the Department of Agriculture inspected her facility a few weeks ago.

“I went on vacation and got a call (from the Department of Agriculture) that things were in terrible condition,” she said. “We went over a few things, and I thought that was it.”

Smith said troubles at the kennel began after she was injured in early May and could not oversee day-to-day operations properly. Smith said she still is seeing a doctor and going through physical therapy, but she would not elaborate on her ailment. She said she hired a woman to run the kennel, but that person didn’t do a good job.

“I do run a clean facility, and my main concern is that every one of my dogs is a pet to me,” Smith said. “I’m one of the few that can turn every one of them loose, and they’ll just walk beside me.”

But Diane Belt and her husband, Jerry, of Grand Junction were not satisfied with the puppy they got from Smith about six weeks ago. Belt said she and her husband love cocker spaniels and were amazed when they saw one of Smith’s ads for cocker spaniel puppies for \$50, which is a low price.

Belt said she and her husband arranged to meet Smith at a parking lot in Clifton, and Smith showed them a dog that was covered with vomit and mud. Belt said they promptly bought the puppy because, “We felt we had to save the dog’s life.”

Belt said Smith told her the dog was cheap because it was an older puppy, about 4 months old, but it had been wormed and had all its shots.

Belt said she took the puppy to a veterinarian and learned the dog was actually about a year old and was riddled with worms.

The dog seemed traumatized, she said, and they could not housebreak it or get it to socialize normally. They eventually had to give it to an animal shelter.

“It was a terrible experience, and I’m really angry with that woman because she lied to us,” Belt said.

Smith disagrees with Belt’s account.

“Yes, it was storming that weekend, and (the puppy) was dirty,” she said. “But it did have its shots. I said she had only had one worming and probably needs to be wormed.”

Smith said the dog was not socialized because it never had been handled and was only out of its pen once or twice a week, and she insisted the dog was only a few months old.

Smith said she loves dogs, that she runs a clean facility and her dealings with her clients are on the up-and-up.

"I've had write-ups before with the state for minor things, but if you go back through the records, you can see I've usually run a pretty clean facility," she said. "I feel like I'm being crucified. People that have been to my place and seen my dogs and my puppies know that I'm not running a puppy mill."

One of Smith's employees, a woman named Connie who wouldn't give her last name, said she worked at Colorow Kennels previously for more than a year and recently was hired back.

"In no way does she run a puppy mill," Connie said.