

## Think Twice Before Giving a Dog as a Gift

**Get in the holiday spirit by helping dogs and cats in other ways.**

Posted: November 30, 2009, 5 a.m. EST

Many people envision giving a child, friend, or other relative a dog during the holidays. The thought of a cute puppy or kitten coming out of a box to lick the face of her new owner is a tempting prospect.

But what may start as a heartfelt moment may quickly fade because the gift giver didn't think the situation through.

"Giving a pet as a gift is risky," says Phil Bushby, D.V.M., professor of Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare at the Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine. "If the recipient doesn't want a pet or doesn't want the particular pet selected, the animal may end up being relinquished to a shelter."

Even though it may take away from the element of surprise, the potential dog owner should be involved in this highly personal decision. Both dog and owner must get along. The dog owner must also be prepared for this new addition, which involves financial commitments, possible introduction to other household pets, and the owner's ability to devote time to the new animal. Without establishing these parameters upfront, the owner may be caught off-guard by this unexpected gift, feel too embarrassed to refuse it, and later give the animal to a shelter, or keep it even though the relationship doesn't work.

Veterinary experts agree that doing something positive for an animal or individual during the holiday season can take a variety of other forms. Contributing food, supplies, money, or time to a local shelter or rescue group shows your generosity. People can also volunteer to pet sit for a friend going on vacation, encourage a friend considering buying a pet to visit a local shelter, or even buy a certificate to spay or neuter for someone who has gotten a new pet.

"Between 6 million and 8 million dogs and cats are housed in animal shelters across the country each year," Bushby says. "With a 70-percent average rate of euthanasia in those shelters, the end result of giving a pet as an unexpected gift may very well be its eventual placement and death there."