

Leonbergers 10-18

With a Little Help From A Friend: The Importance of Breeder Mentoring

It always amazes me when the latest LeoLetter arrives in my mailbox that the Kennel Listing page seems to grow longer with every issue, indicating that more puppy buyers are either planning to breed or are actively producing litters. I never turn the page without offering up a silent plea to the universe that these new breeders have an experienced Leonberger Club of America breeder mentor to whom they can turn with questions and for support and advice.

Matching puppies to just the right home is one of the most difficult tasks for most breeders, and the cause of much indecision and deliberation. Faced with a (hopefully) deep list of puppy people and a healthy litter of toddling Leos, breeders must make critical judgements about which puppy would be a good fit not only with the makeup of each new family, but also has the best chance of meeting their criteria as a future performance, show, and/or breeding dog. Countless hours of observation and honest evaluation of strengths and weaknesses by the breeder's experienced eye ensures that by the time each pup leaves in the arms of its new family, the recipe for a happy, successful partnership is begun.

When the new pup's future includes becoming the foundation stock of a new kennel, that depth of knowledge and familiarity should extend to the new breeder as well. This includes an honest discussion of their intentions and goals in starting their own breeding program, and how they plan to reach those goals. For an experienced breeder, entrusting a new owner and potential new breeder with a healthy, happy pup who carries in her DNA the well-researched pedigrees and generations of careful breeding that preceded her takes a leap of faith and a large measure of confidence that their lines will be maintained and built upon with integrity and honor as part of another kennel. Perhaps the best way to ensure that happens is to offer mentorship to the new breeder. Lending expertise and experience to new breeders will enable them to make the best decisions possible for the improvement of the Leonberger breed, especially when those decisions and the conversations around them are difficult, such as health testing that didn't

turn out as hoped or a carefully planned breeding that fell through, or even a dilemma about screening puppy buyers.

With the rise of social media, we in the dog community often have hundreds of “friends” in our breed who live entire continents away, and with whom we can converse at any time of the day or night about everything from pedigrees to whelping boxes. Unsolicited advice of varying degrees of quality and sincerity is also found in abundance in online communities. As wonderful as those friends can be, they’re no substitute for an experienced Leonberger breeder mentor who knows not only the foundation animal, but also the bloodlines behind him or her.

I was recently chatting with a longtime LCA breeder about mentorship for new breeders and I asked what she’d like to see experienced breeders do in terms of mentoring those who are just starting out with a kennel name and a foundation bitch. “What do I think they should do? How about just DO IT! BE THERE!” In a nutshell, that’s what it boils down to: being there. Thank you to all LCA breeders who have committed to mentoring new breeders, and to those who haven’t, please consider sharing of your time and experience. Maintaining a positive, encouraging and honest mentorship is vital to preserving health and type in future generations of Leonbergers and will help ensure the lasting integrity of your lines.