

Benoit, Bailey in court on year-old animal cruelty charges

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Digby County puppy brokers Gail Benoit and Dana Bailey appeared in court Nov. 3 charged with animal cruelty. The pair have entered not guilty pleas to the charge laid following seizure of 10 puppies from the couple's Roxville property in October, 2007.

Judge Jean Louis Batiot said a verdict would be rendered Jan. 29 following written summaries from prosecution and defense.

In an interview Nov. 3 outside the courtroom, SPCA special constable Nancy Noel and chief provincial investigator Roger Joyce said their warrant to seize two puppies from Benoit and Bailey was in response to complaints filed with the SPCA.

The two officials testified in court Oct. 24 that a search of a darkened garage on the couple's property uncovered a number of puppies. The SPCA officers seized two puppies that day, returning two days later to seize a further eight.

In court Nov. 3, defense lawyer Mike Powers called witnesses Pat Harlow-Robar and Donna Nugent.

Harlow-Robar, who described herself as a social acquaintance of Gail Benoit, said she used Benoit and Bailey's 'Puppies 'R' Us' company to sell her Valley bulldog pups.

She testified that the puppies she turned over to Benoit and Bailey for sale in October, 2007, were healthy, but had not been de-wormed. "All pups are born with worms," she said.

Harlow-Robar said she had used Benoit and Bailey's services in the past and she anticipated receiving \$200 per dog from them.



Dana Bailey, charged with animal cruelty along with partner Gail Benoit, talks to news media outside Digby's courthouse. Jeanne Whitehead photo

Donna Nugent of Pictou County, who was subpoenaed by the defense, testified that she placed an ad on a Halifax website in October, 2007. Her English bulldog had died and she wanted a puppy of the same breed.

Nugent said she received a response from Gail Benoit who said she had purebred English bulldog pups for sale for \$800.

Nugent testified she was not comfortable with Benoit's insistence that they meet in a parking lot. She expected to be able to go to the home or kennel where the pup was born. She said after her initial conversation with Benoit, she continued to receive calls from the puppy broker, including one at 10 p.m. on a Sunday.

Nugent said advertising on the Halifax website also resulted in emails from people detailing their experiences with Benoit. Nugent read that people had purchased sick and dying puppies from Benoit over the years. She was also told that Benoit represented mixed breed puppies as purebreds.

In her testimony, Nugent said she had previously been in conversation with Global News, which planned a feature on puppy mills. She said she and a friend, who wore a concealed microphone, met Benoit in a parking lot in Elmsdale. Global News was filming.

Nugent said the two puppies that Benoit brought to the parking lot that day were not purebred and were unhealthy.

"If I could have scooped them up and taken them to the vet, I would have," said Nugent.

She and Taylor both filed complaints with the SPCA.

Nugent said she was opposed to puppy mills and has her own group on the social website Facebook devoted to shutting down puppy mills.