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Ont. dog owner fined \$14,000 for online breeder bashing

Cheryl Cornacchia, Montreal Gazette: Monday, July 27, 2009

MONTREAL — An Ontario woman has been fined \$14,000 after being found guilty of libelling a commercial dog breeder online.

Ontario Superior Court Judge Michael Galligan heard last week that Lorie Gordon of Brockville, Ont., made the comments about the poor health of her black Labrador retrievers on an Internet pet forum.

The judge ordered Gordon to pay \$10,000 in damages and \$4,000 in court costs to James, Charlene and Nicole Labombard, the owners of the Shawville, Que.-based Paws R Us Kennel.

Galligan ruled the comments Gordon posted online between July 2004 and April 2005 at www.pets.ca and another popular pet websites were defamatory.

But Gordon said on Monday she will appeal the decision with the help of donations from animal-rights advocates.

"I wrote they had sick dogs, which is true," she said.

Luc Barrick, the Ottawa lawyer representing the Labombards, said Gordon and several other witnesses, including representatives from Montreal's SPCA, attempted to portray Paws R Us as a puppy mill.

"They are trying to say a commercial breeder is a puppy mill and they are not," Barrick said. "There are puppy mills out there but my client is not one of them."

Alanna Devine, director of animal welfare at the Montreal SPCA, said she was disappointed that the judge ruled against Gordon.

Hundreds of puppy mills exist across Quebec and limited legislation makes it difficult for inspectors to shut down the operations, she said.

Marko Kulik, one of the owners of the Montreal-based website www.pets.ca where Gordon posted the online comments, said he was shocked by the decision.

"I feel bad for her," said Kulik. "I don't know if she was right or wrong but all she wanted to do was to prevent others from having the same experience."

Gordon's posts about the two dogs she got from Paws R Us — a black Labrador retriever that had to be put down because of severe hip dysplasia and a replacement dog that was diagnosed with epilepsy — generated hundreds of comments on www.pets.ca before they were removed, he said.



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Last week's decision was one of the first to rule on Internet defamation.

In Quebec, a superior court judge ruled earlier this month that officials in the Montreal-area town of Rawdon were right to shut down a website to stop anonymous users from posting derogatory online comments about the mayor and police chief.

In the Ontario case, Galligan wrote Gordon's online comments were more damaging because "the Internet is instantaneous, seamless, interactive, blunt, borderless and far-reaching."

The "impersonal, and the anonymous nature of such communications may itself create a greater risk that the defamatory remarks are believed," Galligan said.

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