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Pets

CD shares Shepherds' sad tale

Lawrence woman joins effort against misbreeding

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The clear blue eyes of a snow-white Australian Shepherd tugged at a Lawrence woman's heart so much, she wrote a song about him and his canine friends.

This summer, singer and songwriter Carol Dressler recorded a compact disc single called "Lethal White." The song is about a type of Australian Shepherd born with genetic defects from improper breeding.

"The song just wrote itself," she said. "It's such a sad situation."

There are four kinds of Shepherds: reds, blacks, blue merles and red merles. Merle describes the patchwork coloring most associated with the breed. When two merles breed, Dressler said about 25 percent of the litter are considered Lethal Whites, meaning they are either blind, deaf or have immune deficiencies. Some are born with all three conditions.

Dressler learned about the dogs from Tony Johnson, a co-worker who asked if she could write a song. Dressler, who describes herself as an animal lover, has three basset hounds: Murphy Brown, Yosemite Sam and Ruby Tuesday.

"I had never heard of merle breeding or Lethal Whites," she said. "I just think it is so heartless and so horrible. If I can do something musically, I thought I could help."

Through the process, Dressler met Cyndi and Dave Cunico, a Mesa, Ariz., couple who help rescue and find homes for Australian Shepherds, especially Lethal Whites.

"There's a lot of them out there," Cyndi Cunico said in a recent phone interview. "Sometimes



Melissa Lacey/Journal-World
Photo

Carol Dressler, at home with her three basset hounds — from left, Yosemite Sam, Murphy Brown and Ruby Tuesday — has created a compact disc single called "Lethal White," about the consequences of misbreeding Australian Shepherds.

they're culled right at birth, or they end up in the shelters and they end up dying. We try to save as many as we can."

The Cunicos have found owners for several Australian Shepherds since they started Aussielads Aussie Rescue four years ago. Two dogs were adopted last weekend, and two of the Lethal Whites featured on the CD — Aiko and Sage — have been adopted.

"Every time you get a Lethal White and you get one adopted, then there's always another one," Cyndi Cunico said. "It never ends. We try to put a little dent in it and make people aware of this problem."

In addition to five regular Aussie Shepherds, the Cunicos also have two 1-year-old Lethal Whites. Cyndi Cunico said Kandoo has one bad eye and can't hear well, and Dimmer is totally blind.

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"With just a little patience and understanding, they make great dogs," she said. "The owners have to work with them. Dogs only know what you teach them."

The Cunicos and Dressler hope to educate people about the misunderstood breed and prevent more Lethal Whites from being born or find good homes for the ones that are.

Dressler is accompanied on the CD by Greg Allen, Lawrence, on guitar and Eileen Matousek, Baldwin, on keyboard.

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