

Puppy store files lawsuit

■ **Suit comes** after weekly protests outside the shop

■ **It alleges** Port Jefferson agency is stealing patrons

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A Stony Brook puppy store has filed a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against a nonprofit animal rescue organization that has been holding weekly protests outside its doors.

In the lawsuit, filed last week in State Supreme Court in Riverhead, The Perfect Puppy claims that protests by Save-A-Pet of Port Jefferson Station have been disrupting business and stealing customers.

Save-A-Pet has been protesting outside The Perfect Puppy on Stony Brook Road nearly every Saturday since the store opened in January.

Dori Scofield, founder of Save-A-Pet, said she and other animal-welfare activists have been picketing the store because, she said, such stores use so-called puppy mills, which mass breed dogs and often keep them in substandard conditions.

"It's not a problem to sell puppies," Scofield said. "It's a problem where they come from."

But Charles Demonte, weekend manager at The Perfect

Puppy, said the store strives to use reputable breeders and if they learn a puppy does come from a puppy mill, "we would send it back."

Demonte said that Save-A-Pet's tactics have led to customers feeling harassed.

"Everyone has the right to assemble for protest," Demonte said. "But when it gets carried away . . . then it becomes a little silly and immature."

The suit also alleges that Save-A-Pet has been trying to direct potential store customers instead to adopt dogs from Save-A-Pet.

Scofield says she's not looking for business — she just wants customers to know where puppy-store dogs come from and urge them to adopt instead.

"I don't care where anybody adopts the pets from. Go to any animal shelter. Municipal shelters are in desperate need of homes for their dogs," she said.

At a court appearance yesterday, the two sides agreed that the protesters would stick to lawful protest — something that Scofield says she already does.

Timothy Glynn, a Stony Brook attorney whose firm is representing Save-A-Pet, said the protesters' actions are protected by the First Amendment.

The lawsuit seeks \$8 million in compensatory and punitive damages. The next court date is scheduled for April 9.