

Animal lovers give pets new homes

DAILY SOUND STAFF REPORT

Hundreds of animal lovers gathered at Tucker's Grove Park Sunday for the inaugural Wags n' Whiskers Festival. Hosted by nonprofit C.A.R.E.4Paws, the event featured adoptable dogs, cats, bunnies and even rats from 14 different shelters and rescue groups throughout the county, including D.A.W.G., ResQcats, Lompoc's C.A.P.A., Santa Maria Valley Humane Society and K-9 Pals.

Out of close to 100 animals, more than a dozen found forever homes during the festival. But, perhaps more importantly, the event shed light on the important work of local shelters and rescue organization, and offered an opportunity for the public to see adoptable pets outside the typical shelter environment.

A mix of animal groups and service providers also set up camp for the day, among them Cottage Hospital Therapy Dogs, Super Sonic Flyball Racing

Team, Camp Canine, Dioji and Carivintas's Dog Lover's Wine Club. Cliff Silber with Dog Planet and Andrea Bratt Frick with K9sBehave put on dog training demonstrations and the American Red Cross gave lessons in pet first aid. A fast-paced agility show by Goleta Valley Dog Club captured the largest audience.

"We couldn't be more thrilled with how the festival turned out," said Isabelle Gulló, who founded C.A.R.E.4Paws—short for Community Awareness, Responsibility, Education—alongside husband Carlos Abitia. "One of our main goals as an organization is to have all the different groups join forces for the greater good of animals—homeless and owned—and I think we see proof of this happening today."

For more information about C.A.R.E.4Paws, call 805-968-2273 or visit www.care4paws.org.



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Event featured Goleta Dog Club agility demonstration

■ PETS

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"Make sure it's a perfect fit before we do an adoption," said co-founder Holly Allison. They require home checks, interviews and follow-up visits to ensure everything is going well. "We like to let the dogs choose the person." Just then a little shi tzu wearing a purple protective cone did her best to woo an elderly couple.

Patty Kelley and her kids Katie, 9 and Conor, 11, were waiting for their husband/father to come cast the final vote but the decision to adopt a smiling brown mix appeared to be in the bag. "I like Poppy a lot. He's not too big and not too small," Conor exclaimed. Hillary Nagler walked from booth to booth hoping to connect with a four-legged friend. "I came fully ready to adopt and I really want a rescue dog," she said. While yesterday was not the day, she will continue to search.

Cody Cassidy recently moved to Goleta from Arizona with his girlfriend. "We were looking at kittens at the Pet House and they suggested we come down here. We weren't intending to adopt a cat today but it just kind of happened." Traveler, a solid-looking grey tabby, reeled them in. "They were talking about him being self-confident," Mr. Cassidy said. "He just has this draw."

Rabbits can sometimes be left out of the discussion but on Sunday they received ample attention. The organization called B.U.N.S. — Bunnies Urgently Needing Shelter — had four bunnies on site. The group works in conjunction with the Santa Barbara County Stray Animal Shelter. Jean Silva, a volunteer since 1982, is Thumper's biggest advocate. "We have about 40 bunnies right now," she said. "We took in 20 after the Jesuita Fire that were all abandoned together at a checkpoint." Miraculously, all will eventually find homes as the facility does not believe in euthanizing. According to Ms. Silva, bunnies have some of the same desirable traits as dogs and cats. They can be litter box trained, come to their names, shake hands and are very affectionate.

It was notable to see how pets inspire people to action when considering the hours put in by volunteers at their separate organizations. Wags 'n' Whiskers presented a unique opportunity for the public to get a taste of their hard work all in one location. C.A.R.E. 4Pets established itself as an umbrella of support for all of these entities.

Some volunteers had been at it for



THOMAS KELSEY / NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS

Demonstrations of all kinds were part of the day's festivities. Above, Andrea Bratt Frick, far right, offers a dog training class with the help of Skida, described as a "Texas cattle dog." At right, Brenda and Ray Rosentrater are all smiles as they adopt Snowball, a poodle mix.

many years while others were just starting out. Oscar Escarsaga, of Lompoc, adopted Angel, a pit bull mix, from K-9 Pals back in May. His experience with the dog has been so positive that he was inclined to start volunteering with the shelter every Saturday. He held a pit bull on a leash hoping he could enjoy the same fate as Angel.

While it was surely hard to resist thoughts of adoption, most people were content just to be amongst like-minded folk. "We'll come to anything that's got to do with animals," said Beth Climo who recently moved to Santa Barbara from Cape Cod with her husband, four cats and a dog. Her father was the former president of the Humane Society and she volunteers there. "It's sad how many pit bull mixes there are," she lamented. "They're all sweethearts."

Aside from the shelters and rescue groups, there were several booths set up promoting businesses including grooming, boarding, specialty products and activities. Carvint's

Winery's picnic bench was a popular destination as Fleet Hamilton and Paul Ramos poured free tastings of their tempranillo rose and syrah. The Solvang-based winery has images of rescue dogs and their stories printed on its labels. They donate a percentage of profits to 40 different charities per each customer's selection. Steve and Loren Shepard represented Super Sonic Flyball, a competitive team sport for dogs. "Dogs that were bred for a job can be kind of a problem if they don't have an outlet," he explained. "There's so much energy, you gotta do something with it."

Along those lines, the Goleta Valley Dog Club put on an agility demonstration which had the crowd cheering loudly. Several dogs raced around the course of hurdles, a tunnel and poles to weave between. Among the star athletes was a pair of black Labs.

Dog training demonstrators went hand-in-hand with the adoption theme. Early in the day, Andrea Bratt Frick, of K9s Behave, gave pointers on dog and bunny training. Later on, Cliff

Silber, of Dog Planet, showed an audience why they shouldn't be deterred from adopting a dog which others might regard as too challenging. He led his Australian Cattle Dog, Butch, through a series of commands. "He used to nip people, go after cats and jump on people," Mr. Silber said. "With consistency and positive thinking your dog can be trained to do what this dog does."

Based on the positive reaction from the community, Wags 'n' Whiskers seems like a festival which made an immediate impact. Cayce Brennan, from the Santa Ynez Valley, excited alongside her 9-year-old niece, Lily Issaris, who is now inspired to volunteer with the D.A.W.G. shelter. "I came to find out about companion dogs and agility," Ms. Brennan said. "I was amazed with all the resources."

"I'm going to sign my dog up for something. I think it was absolutely fantastic."

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