

# Wags 'N' Whiskers Festival aims for animal adoptions

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Shelter animals were the cat's meow at Sunday's Wags 'n' Whiskers Festival at Girsh Park in Goleta.

The festival, which is intended to encourage the adoption of shelter animals throughout the county, was hosted by C.A.R.E.4Paws, an organization that promotes responsible pet ownership and animal welfare in the county.

Eighteen shelters, rescues, animal groups and pet service providers participated at this year's festival, which featured a plethora of dogs, cats and bunnies to be adopted.

C.A.R.E.4Paws was founded by Isabelle Gullo and her husband, Marco Abitia, about 18 months ago.

Ms. Gullo told the News-Press Sunday that the festival was a success, in part due to the fact that there were "a lot more groups this year" than at last year's festival, which had 14 shelters, rescues, animal groups and pet service providers.

"We wanted to bring the animal (advocacy) community together in a way that it hadn't been done before," she said. "In the end, it's all about getting the animals adopted."

Participating were Santa Barbara County Animal Services, Santa Barbara Humane Society, Santa Maria Valley Humane Society, Fetching Companions Lab Rescue and the French Bulldog Rescue Network. Also on hand were ResQcats, Santa Barbara County Animals Care Foundations, Camp Canine, Goleta Valley Dog Club, Kiss My Mutt, Loose Pooch and Paul Mitchell the School - Pet Club.

Ms. Gullo said the significance of having the different groups come together is that there is less chance for a duplication of effort.

She said a focus of C.A.R.E.4Paws is to fight overpopulation in the animal world.

"Someone said it takes a village to raise a child," she



Adelaine, a golden Labrador, leaps a hurdle at the Wags 'N' Whiskers event Sponsored by C.A.R.E.4PAWS. Above right, canine Lillie Perkins is deaf and partially paralyzed. She is the C.A.R.E.4PAWS Education Ambassador. Also pictured is owner Karen Perkins. At right, Jazlyn and Tarkan Ezal, aged 5 and 2, respectively, feed Anastasia, a black rabbit, at the event. Below, a dog named Lexi is a blur of motion as she clears a hurdle.

ERIC ISAACS/NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS



said. "It takes a village to combat overpopulation."

Tuesday, the Santa Barbara Ordinance Committee considered an ordinance regarding the alteration of dogs and cats. Ms. Gullo said the important thing is that pet owners are educated about their options regarding spaying and neutering because it could change their perception of the issue.

"We're not targeting the responsible pet owners," she said. "They're already doing what they need to do."

"More than anything," she said, "(the festival) is about getting the community together."

Ms. Gullo encourages those who may be considering the purchase of a pet from a pet store or private owner to first look in shelters.

"There's so many dogs or cats or bunnies waiting for homes," she said.

She said when considering a shelter pet, a person should "first figure out what kind of pet is best for your family."

"Age and energy level is crucial to making sure it's the right thing," she said, along with making sure that vet bills, food and other expenses are affordable.

"The number one reason people are giving up their pets right now is financial," she explained.

Lastly, a person should establish a relationship with a veterinarian quickly, as well as look into spaying or neutering their pet.

Ms. Gullo, who also celebrated her 37th birthday Sunday, and Mr. Abitia, 38, have five pets -- a mix of Chihuahuas and pitbulls.

Though they started the organization over a year ago, Ms. Gullo said they are "even more passionate about it" today.

"There's so much more to be done," she said, "not just in Santa Barbara County but everywhere."

For more information, go to [www.care4paws.org](http://www.care4paws.org).

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