

Wags 'n' Whiskers coming to SBCC

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If you've been thinking about adopting a pet, get set for the largest pet adoption festival on the Central Coast.

The eighth annual Wags 'n' Whiskers Festival takes place tomorrow at Santa Barbara City College's West Campus, the first of "Dogtober," as organizers are calling it.

The event was started by nonprofit C.A.R.E.4Paws, which rescues and adopts out pets, keeping overpopulation under control with spaying and neutering.

A number of agencies are devoted to similar missions and a shared love of animals, and Wags 'n' Whiskers was born as a way to gather them all together.

Last year more than 30 four-legged friends found new homes, and the festival makes adoption a one-stop-shop for setting up a new pet with everything he or she will need. This year they hope to reach 40.

"It's a new venue, and chance for families who've never been to discover us," said Isabelle Gullo-Abitia, who started C.A.R.E.4Paws. "Plus the location has some of the best views in Santa Barbara."

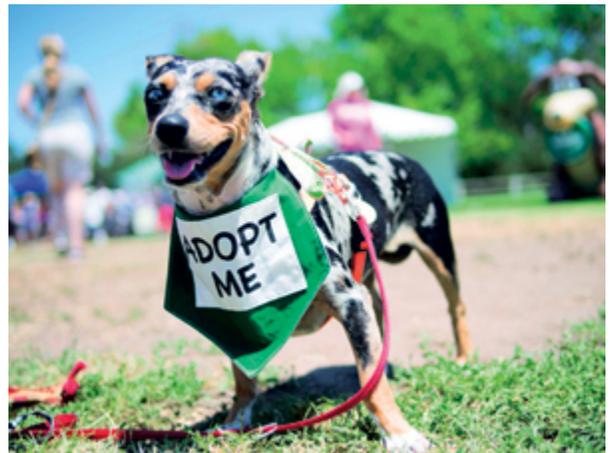
Services offered during the festival include appointments to spay or neuter a pet; a chance to apply for low-cost vaccines, microchips, flea medication and dewormers; several dog and bunny trainers to help get your furry friends under control (including a military working group for dogs); and much more.

In total, 20 animal shelters, rescue groups and animal welfare organizations will be represented.

"It's not only a fun fest for the whole family, but it's an important event," said Ms. Gullo-Abitia. "It helps create awareness around the critical need for rescue and

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Wags 'n' Whiskers educates people on adopting pets in a fun way.

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adoption, affordable spay and neuter programs, and intervention programs that keep pets with their owners for life."

Ms. Gullo-Abitia sums it up succinctly: "Adopt not shop."

And all of C.A.R.E.4Paws' programs are affordable to low-income families, offering reduced rates or free services.

The festival starts at 11 a.m., but the county's Project PetSafe will be on hand from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and is encouraging dog owners to visit their on-site licensing clinic where four legged friends will get an official, up-to-date certificate on their health.

C.A.R.E.4Paws will also kick off its latest campaign, Paws Up 4 Pets, a new youth program for after-school care kids that will promote animal welfare and adoption.

Kids will be able to sign up for the program, earn badges, and learn that "animals have feelings just like us," which, Ms. Gullo-Abitia says, will be part of an art contest on that day.

The nonprofit will also hand out the Fur-ever Friends Award to Dwight and Kim Lowell, who are co-sponsors of the event and who have given to many animal welfare organizations through Chrissie's Fund.

A new event, pet fashion show "Strut Your Mutt," starts at 1 p.m. People can pre-register their dog, cat, or bunny for the show by going to the website or on the day of the event (from 10 a.m. to noon).

"Santa Barbara pet owners love to dress their pets up," Ms. Gullo-Abitia said. "And though dogs love the attention most of all, maybe there will be that one cat that will put the dogs in their place."

To find out, come to Wags 'n' Whiskers, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., at SBCC's West Campus. For more information, call 968-CARE, ext. 2273, or or visit www.care4paws.org.

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