

Wags N' Whiskers breaks adoption record

BY SARA BUSH news-press correspondent

Nearly 40 animals are no longer homeless following the sixth annual Wags N' Whiskers Festival held Sunday at Girsh Park in Goleta.

There were 27 on-site adoptions, and at least 10 more pending home checks, said C.A.R.E.4Paws Executive Director Isabelle Gullo.

Those numbers are expected to grow in the coming days.

"The Wags N' Whiskers Festival doesn't only inspire on the day of, but people get excited about adoption and they go visit the shelters and rescue groups in the days after," Ms. Gullo explained.

C.A.R.E.4Paws, a nonprofit organization, launched the festival back in 2009 in an effort to promote partnerships between the local pet adoption, rescue and welfare groups. (The acronym in the group's name stands for Community Awareness. Responsibility. Education.)

"We work really hard to change the futures of the animals in this community," said Ms. Gullo. "This event is a reflection of that hard work and those collaborations."

Organizers have watched as the yearly festival continues to grow.

It is now considered the largest pet adoption event in Santa Barbara, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties, featuring adoptable dogs, cats and bunnies from more than 25 animal shelters and rescue groups across Santa Barbara County.

"Our goal has always been to establish collaboration with local agencies," said Ms. Gullo.

Dozens of local pet service providers and animal welfare groups were also on site with information booths and demonstrations, including the Santa Barbara Humane Society.

"It is a great way to get exposure and to find a good match for our adoptable dogs," explained Erica Jackson, the Santa Barbara Humane Society's canine adoption counselor. "It helps us network and get to know each other as well as reaching out to the public."

She anticipated at least two dog adoptions as a result from the day-long festival.

"When it comes to homeless animals, any dog out the door to a good home is a success in our books," Ms. Jackson said.



Girsh Park was the scene of Sunday's sixth annual Wags N' Whiskers Festival, where a record 40 animals, including dogs, cats and rabbits, were adopted.
NIK BLASKOVICH / NEWS-PRESS



The event included activities like police dog demonstrations and an obstacle course.

The Santa Barbara Humane Society is a local nonprofit organization not affiliated with the national Humane Society, she explained. The Santa Barbara organization has been around since 1887 and has been at its location on Overpass Road in Goleta since the 1960s, she said.

Festival attendees were encouraged to bring their own animals to take part in a number of events held throughout the day.

Hundreds of visitors showed up to watch shows including the Southern California's Famous Disc Dogs, flyball and police dog demonstrations.

"Santa Barbara is such a dog oriented place. It's kind of nice to have something like this where everyone can bring their dogs and we can all talk about dogs or cats or rabbits. We all have that common ground," said Ms. Jackson.

Last year's event lead to 35 pet adoptions.

"Our mission is to reduce pet overpopulation and keep them out of the shelters, but we also want to promote adoption and spread awareness of the importance of rescue and adoption, along with spay and neutering," said Ms. Gullo.

According to the C.A.R.E.4Paws website, thousands of animals end up homeless each year in Santa Barbara County alone. Many of them are euthanized because there just isn't enough space to house them.

"The pet overpopulation problem is a symptom of what goes on in our community: irresponsible breeding; lack of awareness of the importance of spay/neutering; limited resources to provide responsible pet care; and cultural differences when it comes to pet ownership," the website states.

The organization supports low-income cat and dog owners in Santa Barbara County by providing free spays and neuters, low-cost vaccines and various intervention programs that keep animals in their homes. There are also a number of other programs, including a bilingual community outreach, and dog training intervention.

Often, dogs are relinquished to shelters because of a behavioral issue their owners can't manage, according to the website. The organization offers free basic dog obedience classes with local trainers to avoid that scenario.

For more information, go to www.care4paws.org.