

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

Sequim's free-run dog park about to become a reality

By Diane Urbani de la Paz, Peninsula Daily News

SEQUIM - Her name is Rigby, like Eleanor from the Beatles song.

She's done some waiting by the window.

But she knows, ahh, where all the lonely people do belong: at the just-mowed, more-than-an-acre Sequim Dog Park.

The fenced field, nearly a year in the planning, will have its opening bash from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. April 7.

Mayor Walt Schubert and park planner David Brown could have planned a ribbon-cutting. But that wouldn't be right.

No, they're going to have a grand leash-cutting, to inspire dogs like Rigby.

"She can't wait. She loves every dog. She loves every person," said Rigby's owner, Lynne Angeloro of Discovery Bay.

The young Siberian husky met Janos, a mop-coated Hungarian Komondor, at a Sequim Dog Park Pals get-together.

"She was freaked out," said Angeloro, a member of the Pals board of directors.

Then Margaret Preston, Janos' owner, pushed the thick tendrils of fur from his face.



The Sequim Dog Park Pals, who gather for a preview Monday, plan a grand leash-cutting April 7 to open the city's playground for canines and people inside Carrie Blake Park. -- Photo by Diane Urbani de la Paz/Peninsula Daily News

Once Rigby could see his friendly eyes, the two could commence to frolic.

"They've had a ball ever since," Angeloro said.

Off-leash play

Many more balls will be had by Rigby, Janos and possibly scores of other dogs, the moment they're turned loose at the park, which is designed for off-leash play for well-behaved, healthy, nonsmoking canines and humans.

Last May, Ruth Marcus, Brown, Margaret Preston and a handful of other Sequim residents, tired of limiting their pets to on-leash walks, formed "a new community," as Marcus put it.

They named themselves the Dog Park Pals, and proceeded to persuade the Sequim City Council to approve construction of an off-leash romp space.

It helped that the city didn't have to pay for everything; the Pals gathered some \$15,000 in in-kind donations plus \$6,000 in cash gifts from dog lovers in and around town.

Sequim Public Works Director James Bay found room for the Pals in Carrie Blake Park, at 202 N. Blake Ave., and instructed his crew to plant grass, install a sprinkler system and put in three poop-scoop bag stations.

The stations are already stocked with bags, Marcus said Monday.

Custom gate

Dana Hyde, owner of the Sequim metal-sculpture studio Metal & Mud, is finishing a custom gate she'll donate to the Pals, and it will be up in time for opening day.

Already Terry Selby, a Sequim contractor, has erected a free fence around the grassy field. Had the Pals paid for it, the enclosure would have cost \$10,000, Marcus said.

Allan Bernards of Vision Landscape Nursery also came out to the park to envision some more landscaping. The Pals might put in benches, a water fountain or two, even a gazebo, added Marcus.

Inscribed bricks will line the entry to the park - and they will be paid for by supporters.

"Celebrate your dog," the promotional flier reads.

The bricks, bearing dogs' names and "other special words," up to three lines long, cost \$85 each before April 7 and \$100 after that.

Proceeds from the bricks, combined with the cash donations that have come in over the months since the park concept was born, will pay for the added amenities, Marcus said.

She added that input from park users will drive the Pals' choices of what to install where.

Gathering at the gate

On Monday afternoon, a fraction of Sequim's dog-loving community congregated at the park fence, to anticipate opening day.

Exercising your pet, perhaps starting a conversation with another dog lover, and just watching a bunch of beasts sniffing and tussling with one another is "a fantastic experience," said Dave Neidhardt, another Sequim Dog Park Pals board member.

"We had these in Southern California. People gather and talk and get to know each other's names," he said.

"They know the dogs' names first," added Angeloro.

Neidhardt, who has an 8-year-old yellow Labrador retriever named Dolly, has spent years observing the ways in which dogs manage to get along, while people more gradually accept each other.

"Sometimes guys are macho, and saying, 'My dog's tougher than yours,'" he added.

But after a little while at a dog park, "none of that means anything anymore."

The Pals plan to provide more fencing of an area designated for small dogs. An information kiosk may be installed, too.

The city will mow the grass, Marcus said, while the people who use the park will police the poop cleanup or lack thereof.

"It'll be self-monitoring," she said - like most dog parks around the country.

Marcus' golden retriever, Rumi, is one of the more peaceable creatures in this kingdom.

But Marcus knows opening day will be a scene unlike Sequim has ever seen.

"We're going to have our hands full," she said.

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Q&A session

A free discussion and question-and-answer session on Sequim's off-leash dog park - and its rules - will start at 6:30 p.m. April 4 at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 525 N. Fifth Ave., Sequim.

For information visit www.SequimDogPark.org or phone 360-681-2205.

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