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Dogs finally get their day when off-leash park opens this weekend

By Diane Urbani de la Paz, Peninsula Daily News

SEQUIM - It'll be a grand experiment: a society whose members come in all shapes and sizes, from all walks of life - to stretch, frolic and inspect one another.

Sequim's off-leash dog park, inside Carrie Blake Park at 202 N. Blake Ave., will open at 10 a.m. Saturday with a ceremonial leash-cutting and a speech by Mayor Walt Schubert - and after that, it'll be governed and cleaned by its human users.

The people who made this place happen, the Sequim Dog Park Pals, have high hopes for the honor system.

But Ruth Marcus and Lynne Angeloro, two members of the Park Pals board, are also realistic. They don't expect utopia.

So, along with the poop-bag dispensers at the park, they're posting a list of rules - listed in full at www.sequimdogparks.org - and encouraging people to behave like good parents.

The Pals promote practices that are startling in their similarity to those at day-care centers and playgrounds.

Time-outs at times

Time-outs are good for unruly dogs, they say - just a few minutes away from the pack of people and other canines calms all concerned.



Rigby, Lynne Angeloro's Siberian husky, looks through the gate into the off-leash dog park inside Sequim's Carrie Blake Park. The playground will have its grand leash-cutting party from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday. -- Photo by Diane Urbani de la Paz/Peninsula Daily News

"Dogs are going to tussle. They're going to roughhouse," Angeloro said during a dog park question-and-answer session Wednesday night in Sequim.

Nearly 50 people attended the meeting, and the majority indicated they're owners of small dogs.

The park will have a section especially for them - with temporary fencing that will be adjusted and ultimately replaced after the Park Pals figure out how large the little-dog area needs to be.

Whether running with the big dogs or the small, play can escalate beyond the dog and owner's comfort level, Angeloro said.

Simply take a few minutes out, or leash up for a solo stroll around Carrie Blake Park, she advised.

And don't get so wrapped up in human conversation that you lose track of your animal.

"You can't go to QFC while your dog's at the park," said Angeloro.

Yet "I expect a cottage industry to spring up: people who offer dog park-sitting while you grocery shop."

The Sequim dog park has one bench so far, and more may be added, along with a gazebo and water fountains.

The Dog Park Pals have yet to decide when to put in such amenities, Angeloro said.

"We're having a big discussion on the board about benches. We all want to sit down. But you get to chatting - and where is your dog?"

Angeloro recounted an incident at a California off-leash park where a dog seemed to be picking a fight.

"Whose dog is this?" Angeloro called out.

Only after she added a four-letter word did she find the owner - on a bench, talking on a cellular phone.

Share the toys

Marcus talked about toys next.

They're allowed at the park, but people and dogs should share, she said.

"If you really want to be possessive about a toy, leave it at home."

Angeloro, for her part, promised to bring community tennis balls, Frisbees and other playthings and leave them at the park.

She asks only that users put them back in the toy box, so city crews don't confront them while mowing the grass.

The park is 1.7 acres - larger than the 1-acre space planned when the dog-park movement began a year ago.

"We have great support from the city," said Marcus.

The Pals persuaded the Sequim City Council to approve construction of the off-leash romp space in Carrie Blake Park.

The city didn't 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.

But, Sequim may see some new revenue resulting from the park, since its users are required to have licenses.

And occasionally, city code enforcement officer Lisa Hopper will stop by, to check on compliance.

But she won't turn the park into a police state, Marcus said.

Hopper has other things to which she attends, such as abandoned cars on Sequim streets.

During Saturday's grand-opening festivities, veterinarians will vaccinate dogs to meet the licensing requirements.

Be polite

Dianne Canafax, a certified dog trainer from Kingston, came to Wednesday's

meeting to share tips on how human body language promotes polite canine behavior.

When you meet a new dog, treat it like a human stranger, she suggested.

Don't invade its space.

Stand back and, if the dog seems relaxed, extend a hand to be sniffed.

Let the dog approach you, rather than moving in right away.

If the dog seems comfortable, you might scratch it below the chin or on the chest.

Above all, don't hug a dog upon your first meeting.

Hugging is a primate behavior - chimps and people do it, but dogs don't, as a general rule.

And various breeds have varying needs -herding dogs want plenty of personal space while golden retrievers are inclined to get in your face.

Marcus emphasized that dog-free people are also welcome to come and enjoy the park - and needn't be members of the Pals organization.

"This park's for everyone,": she said.

"It's going to be a wonderful community thing."

A GRAND "UNLEASH ME" party for Sequim's off-leash dog park will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at Carrie Blake Park, 202 N. Blake Ave., Sequim.

A hot-dog cart, The Buzz espresso bus, a dancing dog demonstration, vaccinations and microchipping by veterinarian Linda Allen of Pacific Northwest Veterinary Hospital, of Sequim, and prize drawings are among the festivities.

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