

Sunday, April 08, 2007

## Sequim's off-leash dog park opens

By Diane Urbani de la Paz, Peninsula Daily News

SEQUIM - The dogs showed the humans how it's done.

When you go to a gathering, trot up to strangers, introduce yourself, and run around the room, inviting other new friends as you go.

That was easy in Sequim's freshest party space, the off-leash dog playground at Carrie Blake Park, 202 N. Blake Ave.

Saturday's grand opening unfolded under a dreary sky, but you wouldn't have known that from the behavior of some 100 dogs and many more people.

Shortly after 10 a.m., Sequim Mayor Walt Schubert and Dog Park Pals board president David Brown clipped a ceremonial leash, opened the custom-sculpted gate and let a throng of dogs and owners in.

First to enter was Beth McHugh and her standard poodle, Beamer, in a tribute to the man who donated the dog park's fencing, Sequim contractor Terry Selby.

Selby was too shy to bask in the glory Saturday, so McHugh, his partner, came in his stead, carrying a framed photo of their deceased dog, Casey.

Following her in were dozens of men, women and canines: poodles, pointers, Saint Bernards, a Samoyed and a big batch of bichon frises.

And unlike many people at parties, the dogs knew instantly how to break the ice.

They fetched tennis balls, politely sniffed others - whatever their size and shape differences - and after a while, the humans were laughing and chatting.

"This shows what can be done when you have cooperation between the city and other groups," said Schubert, who added that Sequim's Public Works Department contributed 5,000 hours of labor and \$415,000 in land, irrigation hardware and installation of what he called "doggie bag stations."

"Two hundred yards of fill and grass seed," Schubert added, "were donated by local developers."

### **Grass roots effort**

The off-leash park, which will be open from dawn to dusk like the rest of Carrie Blake Park, grew out of a year-long process linking the city and the Sequim Dog Park Pals.

That grass-roots group sprang from local dog walkers' desire for a place to unleash their pets.

Brown and a pack of other dog lovers built a Web site, [www.SequimDogPark.org](http://www.SequimDogPark.org), and persuaded the Sequim City Council last spring to green-light the playground.

Then, at festivals and pet stores across Clallam County, the Pals promoted the park as a place for people and dogs - and people without dogs - to come out, stretch and just be together.

The Pals raised about \$6,000 in cash plus \$15,000 in in-kind donations, including the fence that would have cost \$10,000, said Marcus.

The city supplied much of the landscaping and will mow the grass - but the park will be self-governed by its users, she added.

On Saturday, Brown detailed "the vision for what we have left to do. We want more landscaping, with trees and shrubs, and play features for the dogs to climb on and under; drinking water for people and dogs, and a gazebo and benches. This, as [city Public Works Director] Jim Bay said, is going to be a park we can all be proud of."

The Pals accepted more donations during the grand opening, and will continue doing so through its Web site.

And the dogs, unencumbered by things like pride, proceeded to get good and muddy, and seemed to have no trouble getting along.

The park has a designated area for smaller dogs, and that was soon populated

by a flurry of snow-white bichon frises - who became black-bellied after frolicking in the damp grass.

Kirby, a black border collie, didn't show the dirt as much.

"I'm new to the dog world," said his owner Melodie Bush of Sequim, between high tosses of a tennis ball.

"We need a place like this."

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