

## The Graying of the Sport

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AUGUST 5, 2009, 1:40 P.M. EDT

We're reading a lot about the graying of our sport recently. Year in and year out, we seem to see the same faces at our shows. Many of us have chosen not to have children and those with kids seldom find them expressing any interest in sharing our hobby with us.

And yet at the same time we hear newcomers to the world of conformation shows complain about how aloof and unpleasant exhibitors can be. Small wonder, then, that buyers of show puppies are happy to have the breeders show their dogs but feel little motivation to enter the sport themselves.

More and more kennel clubs seem to function on an "invitation only" basis, missing a golden opportunity to recruit new owners who probably have untold talents to share.

We've got to remember that we were all rookies once. If a newcomer comes to a show to see purebred dogs in the flesh and approaches you at the wrong time, take a moment to explain that you are rushing to get a dog ready for the ring but if they return after you're done, you'll be glad to discuss your breed with them and see if it would make a suitable addition to their home.

Clubs can certainly set up an information table, with members putting in an hour each to answer questions, give short tours of the show and explain how a dog show works.

Inviting some local politicians or media personalities to a show can generate much-needed public exposure. There is no better way to combat breed-specific legislation than to show our well-trained and well-behaved show dogs in a positive light.

By offering Canine Good Citizen testing and health clinics at our shows we demonstrate to the public that producing healthy purebreds is our No. 1 goal, contrary to the message that the animal-rights zealots might be preaching.

Junior Handling classes may inspire dog-loving youngsters to attend shows and develop a closer bond with their pets at home.

All dog clubs need members who can serve as goodwill ambassadors at the grassroots level, explaining the benefits that dogs provide in our fast-paced, often isolated world. Without having dogs to show, they can volunteer the time to give show tours, speak to the public and take the mystery out of conformation.

Let's embrace our newcomers and view them not as an inconvenience but as a welcome addition to rejuvenate our clubs and help keep our sport viable in the years to come.

- Read more of The Dog Insider blog -