

## DOGTOWN USA

**Coeur d'Alene has been called a slice of heaven; as we know, all dogs go to heaven.**

*By Susan Chaney*

No single person, organization, or law can make a city dog-friendly. It takes ongoing effort and dedication from many people.

That's exactly how Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, became the winner of DOG FANCY's 2011 DogTown USA contest.

Although lots of dogs have lived in the town of 47,000 for as long as anyone can remember, it was just last year that the first dog park opened. In 2008, the city and the Kootenai Humane Society partnered to give homeless dogs a better adoption chance. Two years ago, the Dog About Town website launched, hosting a doggie events page, and a year later its publication began for dog lovers in Coeur d'Alene and surrounding areas of the Inland Northwest. Dog d'Alene, an annual downtown dog celebration, kicked off four years ago. The city of 17,000 dogs has made great strides in a few short years.

After less than a year of operation, the Kootenai County Dog Park Association and the city are working together to add more leash-free opportunities for dogs and their owners. A huge tract of land has been identified, and small "pocket" dog parks may open in new and existing city parks.

Terry Wright put in two years with the association helping to get the dog park, Central Bark Park, going. "We are just a committee of dog-loving people that saw the need and the benefit of a dog park for the city of Coeur d'Alene, not only for the dogs, but for the people, as well."

Wright lives in nearby Hayden with her two Labrador Retrievers, Echo, 3, and Porter, 2. She says whenever she drives by the dog park, somebody's in it. "It's been busy since we opened, throughout the winter. The dogs are just happy to be out and run and sniff."

But the city's dogs have much more than a single dog park to explore.

Thanks to shop and restaurant owners along Sherman Avenue, the city's main drag is super-friendly to the canine crowd. Christmas by the Lake is a good example. Mary Peak and her husband opened the shop nine years ago, after relocating from the East Coast. Their two Lab mixes are at the shop every day, as are lots of other business owners' dogs.

"We're very doggie here," Peak says. "Sometimes I'll turn around and five kids are petting the dogs."

In fact, Peak and Gay Glassen came up with the idea for Dog d'Alene when trying to meet a challenge of the Coeur d'Alene Downtown Association to create events for summer evenings.

"We were sitting there saying, 'we need to do a dog night.'"

The third Dog d'Alene in May drew 400 to 500 dogs, Peak says, with contests, demonstrations, live music, vendor and rescue booths, and a Dachshund dash. She recalls the first year when a "big burly guy won the Best Trick contest. He was so proud, walking around with his dog with his ribbon. We don't have fights; we don't have snarling. Everybody has a really good time."

Of course, Dog d'Alene only happens once a year. But Coeur d'Alene's many trails, and its river and lake, are open for canine fun all the time.

Katie Kosanke, who works for the parks department, likes to hike on Tubbs Hill with her two Golden Retrievers, Stella and Woody, both 2. "It's just one of the best locations," she says, "a nice, natural area with trails throughout. It's really peaceful." Right on the shore of Lake Coeur d'Alene, it also has a great view for two-legged walkers.

To keep track of all the doggie fun, residents look to Dog About Town, co-published and edited by Chris Shafer. "I just wanted to be a pet advocate for what's out there for people to do with their dogs," she says.

Her magazine sponsors social walks in the spring and fall, followed by refreshments at Bakery by the Lake. You can see dogs on the restaurant's patio any time of day, she says. "Coeur d'Alene seems very welcoming to me." Her dog Riley, 3, is like many others in town, a Mixed Breed who is a natural icebreaker. "You'll talk to people you never would have talked to," she says.

Events and hikes and dog-friendly shopkeepers say a lot about a city's attitude toward its canine citizens. But most dogs might tell you -- if they could -- that their biggest fear is ending up at the animal shelter.

Well, not in Coeur d'Alene. Since the city partnered with the humane society, the shelter's not such a bad place to be. The only dogs who don't find homes are either too sick to treat successfully or have an insurmountable behavior problem. The partnership was designed such that no homeless dog would be euthanized due to lack of space, length of time at the shelter, or breed.

So, whether a dog likes a place to run and hike, loves to mingle downtown, or needs a new home, he's got it made in Coeur d'Alene, a little slice of dog heaven.

[DOGFANCY Editor Ernie Slone Visits Coeur d'Alene>>](#)

Regional runners up

Dog love is spreading across the country. These towns go above and beyond to make life great for our furry best friends.

Northeast

Doylestown, Penn.  
People: 26,700  
Dogs: 5,000

Doylestown is small but mighty when it comes to its dogs. Canine residents are about to get their first dog park, which will cover 3 acres with sections for big dogs, small ones, and other activities. More than 60 businesses participated in March Muttness this year to raise money for the park.

"It is extremely rare to visit a park or attend an event without seeing dogs and their families," says Karen A. Sweeney, director of parks and recreation. Dogs are welcome at almost all community events, she says.



Plus, numerous events cater to the four-legged crowd, such as local “yappy hours,” Howl-O-Ween, Pups & Pizza Night, Bark & Wine, organized dog walks, and holiday photo ops.

Ninety percent of the town’s dogs are licensed, while 80 percent are spayed or neutered. And the dogs who do find their way into the Bucks County SPCA shelter are very likely to find a new home.

## Northwest

Bend, Oregon  
People: 82,000  
Dogs: 16,090

Oregon has a reputation as a great place for outdoorsy people. During the past decade, its seventh-largest city has earned the same for dogs. Trails, parks, and other venues have joined in welcoming the doggie set into the fun.

Bob Wenger, a board member of DogPAC which spearheaded the effort to take the leash off Bend area trails, says a big part of Bend’s success is due to the number and quality of organizations dedicated to helping and promoting dogs. “[We have] an exceptional humane society, several animal placement and spay and neuter groups, DogPAC, and search and rescue and avalanche rescue dog groups.”

It’s not all about fun, though. Sixty to 70 percent of Bend’s dogs are spayed or neutered, thanks to low-cost clinics and conscientious owners. The Humane Society of Central Oregon accepts any animal regardless of age, health, or temperament, finding homes for 87 percent of them.

## Southeast

Knoxville, Tenn.  
People: 182,337  
Dogs: 72,635

Knoxville has a bit of an edge over many other American cities when it comes to dog supporters. The pet products company PetSafe is headquartered there, and its shelter has a major foundation grant for spay-neuter procedures.

PetSafe does a lot for Knoxville dogs, according to Young-Williams Animal Center’s Tim Adams. It provided \$500,000 to create five dog parks, three of which are completed.

A \$2.5 million Aslan Foundation grant pays the bills for a free-to-anyone spay-neuter clinic operated out of the animal center. Established in 2007, the clinic has done 23,000 surgeries to date.

The city also boasts its own dock-diving association. Smoky Mountain Dock Dogs’ members get together to practice, then travel to regional competitions. Hiking opportunities abound in and around Knoxville, too.

Just 6 1/2 percent of Knoxville’s shelter dogs are relinquished by their owners, and more than 50 percent of shelter dogs find new homes.

## Southwest

Santa Cruz, Calif.  
People: 59,684  
Dogs: 12,912

A California city never fails to appear on the DogTown USA list. Santa Cruz made the cut this year partly due to the fact that 75 percent of its dogs are spayed or neutered. In addition, almost 80 percent of the dogs who end up at the shelter find homes. That's a dog-loving community.

It's also a great place to live if you're a dog with an active owner.

"Santa Cruz is a beautiful place where you can go from a sandy beach to the deep forest in minutes," says Whitney Wilde, pack leader of Woofers & Walkers, which takes a weekly hike followed by "yappy hour."

You can do a nature walk with your dog at Big Basin Redwoods State Park, take him to the off-leash dog beach, hitch a ride on a water taxi, visit the surfing museum, hike through the redwoods, or even climb aboard Roaring Camp Railroads' beach train.

Think your town has what it takes to be the next DogTown USA?

Subscribe to DOG FANCY! [Click here >>](#)