

Hill's Names America's Fittest Pets

Contest encourages owners to make changes in lifestyles, feeding habits of dogs, cats.

Posted: January 26, 2009, 5 a.m. EST

Misty, a Golden Retriever owned by Dorene Davis from Holiday, Fla., and Thomas, a cat owned by Sharon Decuir from Fort Worth, Texas, are the canine and feline grand prize winners of Hill's Pet Nutrition's America's Fittest Pets Contest.

The announcement was made Jan. 19 at the North American Veterinary Conference in Orlando, Fla., at the Disney Wide World of Sports Complex.

The contest, one part of Hill's participation in the AVMA/Hill's Alliance for Healthier Pets Obesity Awareness and Prevention Program, encouraged pet owners to work with their veterinary healthcare teams to make changes in their pets' lifestyles and feeding habits to help them lose weight. These changes came through regular veterinary weigh-ins, monitored feeding, including the introduction of Hill's Prescription Diet r/d brand pet food, and regular physical activity.

Through the program, Misty went from 118 pounds to 78 pounds and Thomas went from more than 17 pounds to 15.8 pounds. While Thomas losing 1.2 pounds might not seem significant at first glance, it's the equivalent of a 130-pound woman losing 10 pounds. Decuir also announced that she lost 30 pounds herself just by being more health-conscious.

Other canine contestants included Behlee, a Jack Russell Terrier owned from Troy, Mo., Jasper, a Labrador Retriever from Medford, Ore., and Cody and Moe, Labrador Retrievers New Port Richey, Fla.

Entries were judged on the following criteria: creative writing style in telling the story of the pet's weight-loss experience, expression of the challenges faced or overcome, the resulting percentage of body weight lost, and the effect the pet's weight loss has had on the pet owner and family.

The grand prize winners were determined by a panel of judges including nationally recognized personal trainer Gunnar Peterson, I. Craig Prior, BVSc, veterinary health care team member at Murphy Road Animal Hospital in Nashville, Tenn., and Kathy Wright, creative director at Kids and K-9s for Healthy Choices in Ocala, Fla.

Hill's is continuing to spread the message about the pet obesity epidemic into 2009. Updated tactics include providing improved communication and compliance kits to veterinary clinics across the country, and beginning in March, the broadcast of radio and television public service announcements. These PSAs will highlight the dangers of obesity and the importance of routine pet checkups with a veterinarian.

More than 12,000 Obesity Awareness and Prevention Kits were requested by pet hospitals across the United States in the first year of the program. In addition, more than 16,000 individuals signed the PetFit Challenge pledge at PetFit.com, a symbol of a renewed commitment to their pet's health, according to Hill's.