

Dogs Gather in Canada for Woofstock

The seventh annual Woofstock festival draws 180,000 people to celebrate dogs.

By Katy French

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Approximately 180,000 dog lovers and their furry friends flooded the streets of the St. Lawrence Market Neighbourhood in Toronto, Canada, last month for Woofstock 2009. The canine-centric event, now in its seventh year, was the biggest celebration yet.

"This is the only event like it in North America," says Marlene Cook, Woofstock founder and organizer. "And as a whole, it was fantastic."

Held June 13 and 14, the event featured a variety of entertainment for dogs and their owners. Contests like the Ms. & Mr. Canine Canada Pageant, Dyson Next Top Animal Dog Trick Contest and Woofstock Fashion Show invited dogs to show off their best, while events like the Paws to Remember Memorial Service helped owners honor their best friends. Nearly 200 vendors were onsite selling the latest and greatest in doggie wares, and there was something for everybody.

New features like the Wine & Beer Garden were also introduced this year, but the kickoff event was particularly unique.

"We did Woofstock weddings," Cook says. "They were a lot of fun, and we had a really good turn out."

Fifteen doggie couples exchanged vows at a high tea ceremony at the Le Meridien King Edward Hotel. The best dressed couple even won a honeymoon weekend package from the hotel.

Woofstock encourages owners to connect and celebrate their love of dogs. Entertaining events like the Yappy Hour Dog Party allows them to do just that.

"People start networking, and soon you'll see 15 Great Danes together," Cook says. As dog lovers, owners also enjoy exposure to dogs they may not normally encounter. "People are amazed to see rare breeds they've never seen before."

The larger community also benefits from the canine invasion. "A lot of people in the area take advantage and extend patios to dogs," Cook says. "The whole event is so positive and people are just happy."

And fostering an environment of fun and celebration is what the pooch party is all about. But a significant part of sharing that doggie love is extending compassion to all dogs. That is why Woofstock advocates animal rescue, Cook says.

It hosted the annual Rescue Me Walk-a-Thon, which raised funds to support Ontario's nonprofit organization K9 Rescue Me. The charity event, held at Berczy Park, also featured an additional 25 to 30 nonprofits.

Cook is confident Woofstock will continue to grow and says it gets larger every year. She hopes to take it to the U.S. soon, and looks forward to the first Winter Woofstock in Toronto in November 2010.

"It's pretty much just an amazing event," Cook says. "We say dogs are the new family, and I think this is just a great celebration of canine companionship."

Katy French is the assistant editor of DOG FANCY magazine.