

New Yorkers Meet, Mingle With 160 Dog Breeds

“Meet the Breeds” event lets pet lovers get up close and personal with variety of cats and dogs.

By Nikki Moustaki

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Photographs courtesy
American Kennel Club

On a drizzly October weekend in New York City more than 36,000 people stood in line – some for over half an hour – to buy tickets for a first-of-its-kind event: 160 breeds of dogs and 41 breeds of cats, all under one roof in the Jacob Javitz Center in midtown Manhattan.

Inside the 115,000 square foot convention space, barking and meowing replaced the sounds of urban New York, along with the buzz of hundreds of Girl Scouts asking cat and dog breeders questions to earn a merit badge in responsible pet ownership.

The American Kennel Club, in conjunction with the Cat Fanciers' Association, hosted this family-friendly event on Oct. 17 and 18, and featured demonstrations in grooming, agility, training, and more. Each cat and dog breed had its own booth, and breeders encouraged attendees to pet and handle the animals. The throng of visitors could even give Westminster and Crufts dog show winners, Uno the Beagle and Coco the Norfolk Terrier, a scratch behind the ears.

The décor of most booths creatively reflected the breed's ancestry or purpose. Nicki Beerman, a Labrador Retriever breeder and fancier from New York was encouraged to design a hunting or water scene for her Labs booth, but she had another idea.

“NYC isn't a hunting place, and they wouldn't let me bring guns into the Javitz Center anyway,” says Beerman, who traded the notion of weapons for a king-size bed, Lab sheets, and Labrador printed flannel pajamas.

“When I think of Labradors I think of cuddling with them – on a cold night I can have six of them in the bed. This is what a Labrador is to me, comfort and empathy and love.”

Dennis Sprung, president of the AKC, came up with the idea for the expo six years ago. He believed that combining dogs and cats would create an opportunity to educate the public about responsible pet ownership.

“There are many people who have come to the AKC booth to thank us, saying that they came here with the ambition of deciding on what breed they want to get, and that they are impressed with the predictability of the pure breed dog,” says Sprung. “It gives people the opportunity to know well in advance exactly what they're going to have as a member of the family.”

The AKC plans to repeat the event next year and is looking into hosting it in other cities as well.

Nikki Moustaki is a freelance writer who lives in New York City.