

Bark at the Capitol Festival to Celebrate Dogs

Organizers invite dog owners of California to celebrate pet ownership.

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There's a party in Sacramento to celebrate the "doggie lifestyle" and everything about it. No reservations are necessary, and dogs and their owners are invited to show up June 25 at Capitol Park, across from the steps of the California State Capitol Building.

Bark at the Capitol, the inaugural festival dedicated to canines, is a day to rejoice in the bonds people share with dogs, recognize the contributions that they make to society, and socialize with other pet owners who value their four-legged family members, said Bill McFadden, president of Concerned Dog Owners of California, the nonprofit group that's hosting the event.

"That location," McFadden said, "Allows any legislator that has questions to come down and get answers."

Dog rescue groups, and police and military dog handlers are among the special guests. The family-oriented event also features educational programs, demonstrations, contests, celebrities, and dog-related services.

McFadden said he expects the event to be an "eye-opener" for many of the guests. The goal is to help people realize the spectrum of responsibilities of dog ownership, from picking up after dogs and not disturbing the neighbors to decisions such as how and when to spay or neuter a pet, he said.

Mandatory spay-neuter legislation is opposed by McFadden and CDOC, and the group is fighting AB 1634, a statewide initiative to mandate that most pet dogs and cats in California are sterilized by 6 months of age. McFadden's stance is for voluntary spay-neuter where appropriate.

The measure, introduced by Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, passed the Assembly on a 41-38 vote last June and is now in the Senate Local Government Committee.

It's unfortunate, McFadden said, that the spay-neuter debate has caused people that should be united to be divided. An alternative approach to control the dog population is through education, he said.

Information about this and other dog-related issues will be offered at the event to inform pet owners about the resources available to them. In addition, other activities and entertainment planned include dancing dogs and agility demonstrations, as well as a special appearance by Uno, the Beagle who won Best in Show at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

A highlight of the day, McFadden said, will be a presentation of The Kennel Club's Friends for Life award honoring valiant and humanitarian acts performed by dogs. Nomination essays are being accepted and are due to organizers by June 15.

Bark at the Capitol is a free event from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday, June 25 at Capitol Park. There is a \$5 suggested donation at the door.

"It's not a preachy kind of day, we're not out there demonstrating," McFadden said. "We just want to celebrate dogs, period."

For more information about the event, or to submit a nomination for The Kennel Club's Friends award, visit www.barkatthecapitol.org