

## Uno: America's New Dog Icon

**The 2008 Westminster-winning Beagle has earned a new kind of canine celebrity status.**

*By Sandy Robins*

When Uno the Beagle won the 132nd Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show in February 2008, no one could have predicted that overnight he would become America's newest single-name celebrity, drawing crowds of admirers wherever he went.

A true celebrity, Uno gets his very own airplane seat. Photos courtesy David Frei "I've learned to operate every camera phone in America," jokes David Frei, director of communications for the Westminster Kennel Club, who has been squiring Uno to his public engagements. "Wherever we go, people clamor to have their photograph taken with him and get close enough to pet him. It's unprecedented in the history of this world-famous dog show."

Uno was literally an underdog, according to MSNBC. The site's odds on the event were 325 to 1 against his winning, with dog-show pundits claiming that 2008 was going to be the Year of the Poodle. But sheer canine charisma won the day. The moment Uno appeared on the green carpet for the Best in Show lineup, the crowd went wild. And when he won, they rose to their feet in a standing ovation.

Frei, who during his 20-year career with the Westminster Kennel Club has worked with all the previous winners, says Uno's special appeal is that he's "every man's dog."

"It's easy to relate to having dog like him at home," Frei says. "He has a wonderful, easygoing personality and is lovely around both people and other dogs. He truly represents why we love dogs in the first place and highlights the special role they have in our lives."

At Uno's first press conference, Frei joked that if the dog's popularity continued he would have to get him an apartment in New York to fulfill all his public engagements.

And that's exactly what happened. Uno's owner, Caroline Dowell of Austin, Texas, decided that instead of clocking up frequent flyer miles on a weekly basis, it would be easier if the Beagle lived with Frei in New York.

The dog's public engagements have rivaled any demanding celebrity schedule. People lined up for eight hours in the hot California sun when word got out that he was going to meet Snoopy, the world's other most famous Beagle, at Knott's Berry Farm theme park. Baseball enthusiasts cheered and roared their approval when he "threw" the first pitch at a Milwaukee Brewers game, and again when the St. Louis Cardinals played the Atlanta Braves. He thrilled crowds watching the popular Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade when he rode on the Peanuts float.

Due to his celebrity status, American Midwest Airlines upgraded him from "carrier class," actually issuing him his own seat. He checks in with a ticket that lists him as "Uno Frei."

Uno poses with the TSA official tasked with "wanding" him. "It was really funny when TSA officials randomly selected him for a security check to discover the passenger they'd singled out was a dog," Frei laughs. "They frisked him down with a wand all the same. It's nice to know that we are safe from terrorist Beagles."

To round off his year as America's top dog, Uno will team up with four recent Westminster winners for an Angel on a Leash fundraising event in New York. It will be the first time that a Westminster-winning celebrity lineup has been gathered.

But it won't be Uno's final curtain call.

In true celebrity fashion, even after he's handed over the leash to the next Westminster winner, the "puparazzi" will likely



see that he remains newsworthy.

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