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## Pottstown the top dog among relays

Monday, April 20, 2009

Hundreds of people walking their dogs on the green and flowered grounds of an historic dance hall and ballroom ... The sun shining in a cloudless sky, as children and pets played games, snacked, shopped the vendor booths and chatted with friends.

This was the scene at Sunnybrook on Saturday for the second annual Bark for Life canine relay – a showcase of the Pottstown area that brought national Relay for Life officials from as far as Atlanta and local event organizers from as far as Seattle, Wash.



And, for showing off the Pottstown area to others, the 500-some dogs in attendance didn't disappoint.

"This is impressive as heck," said Reuel Johnson, the National Vice President of the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life, who traveled to Pottstown from Atlanta to witness the groundbreaking event firsthand.

"Pottstown is a great model; a community that takes up the fight. It's a great story we tell around the country," Johnson said.

He brought with him to the Pottstown Bark for Life a number of colleagues, including Frank McGrady, the Chief Operating Officer for the Pennsylvania Division of the ACS, and Ruth Ann Dailey, the Regional Vice President for the Southeastern Region of the ACS. Event organizers from seven states also visited Pottstown to get ideas for involving dogs in their own Relays.

Johnson reminded the crowd -- some sitting quietly on their haunches, others standing at bay -- that Pottstown is one of the top five Relays in the world. In this 25th anniversary year of the ACS' largest fundraising event for cancer support and research, Pottstown represents the best of grassroots efforts to find a cure for cancer.

Saturday's event raised money toward the 2009 Pottstown Relay for Life goal of \$1.1 million and set a tone of enthusiasm and pride to carry over into the main Relay event at the end of May. Speakers, vendors, and committee members led by Bark for Life chairperson Sue Dudek staged tributes, activities, and "goodies" for people and their pets, bringing an atmosphere of fun to the day, even as the serious business of fighting cancer was being furthered.

The dogs stole the show. Four hundred and seventy dogs registered for the one-mile walk in two laps around the grounds of Sunnybrook, but Dudek estimated there were at least 500 in attendance because some registered as pairs or in threes. They ranged from the tiniest terriers to the largest Bouviers, with every breed and mutt imaginable in-between.

They walked calmly on leashes. They sniffed, yapped a little, barked to prove their worth from time to time, but on the overall canvas of the event, they were a well-behaved and orderly lot, taking seriously their role as trend-setters in cancer fundraising.

It was impossible to view the grounds of Sunnybrook Saturday morning without smiling. The crowd was larger than expected, and although the amount of money raised was not yet tabulated, Dudek and co-chair Angie Henderson predicted a good chunk of change would be added into the Relay tally following the event.

"Amazing" was repeated over and over again by the national Relay officials attending, as they surveyed the scene.

Amazing, indeed. We let the dogs out, and they led the way Saturday to prove once again that this region will not give up the fight to find a cure for cancer, nor will it stop fund-raising to support caregivers and prevention efforts in the battle against this disease.

Saturday's Bark for Life was a resounding success for all that it demonstrated about the region and about making a difference in the world.

Good job, dogs.

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