

PET TALES

Show-Offs

Spring weekends are a great time to go to the dogs

BY DR. MARTY BECKER
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Universal Press Syndicate

A dog show has to be one of few competitive endeavors in which the majority of spectators don't know who the players are and don't really care who wins.

Most people come to a show to see beautiful dogs, buy a new leash or toy, or even try to figure out the answer that old question: Do people look like their dogs?

The dog show season runs almost year around — with a gap around Christmas — and hits a high point at the prestige shows early each year: the American Kennel Club's national championship and historic Westminster.

The moderate weather of spring makes this one of the better times to catch a dog show, and there are shows going on all across the country every weekend.

Some tips to get the most out of your trip:

- Dress appropriately. Comfortable shoes are a must, and clothing that can adjust to temperature changes is also advisable if the show's outdoors. If you're researching a breed or looking for a breeder, bring a notebook and pen. Since shopping is a major dog show activity, consider bringing a tote bag to haul away your goodies. Seating is often

in short supply, so if you have one of those collapsible cloth camping seats, bring it.

- Get a program. Different breeds show at different times in different rings. Most larger shows will have a free one-page directory to rings and times. If you're on a research mission, pay for the full catalog, which lists the dogs in competition and is a good resource in the hunt for a reputable breeder.

- Beware of handler. Sometimes the dogs can be friendlier than the people with them. Although many professional handlers will take time to answer questions if you ask when it's convenient, others consider spectators an unwelcome distraction from the hard work of getting a dog groomed and shown. It's probably best to avoid the big setups of the top professional handlers and look for a person with just a couple of dogs, such as a breeder or owner who's handling her own dogs.

- Beware of dog. Show dogs are generally well-behaved and well-socialized, but common sense dictates asking a handler's permission before petting a dog. The grooming that goes into some breeds is so time-consuming and elaborate that it's often best to wait until after competition to pet a dog, anyway. Ask before petting, and you'll never go wrong.

- Enjoy the show. Dog shows are often

While showing dogs is serious business for those who make their living at it, for spectators, a dog show is just fun.



Pets of the Week



>>Gretta
Meet Gretta (387412), a nine-month-old border collie and German shepherd mix. She is a little shy at first, but will quickly warm up. She would do best in a home with other dogs to play with.



>>Tracy
Tracy (387122) is a sweet girl with a fluffy, brown tiger stripe coat. She is very gentle and quiet.

stressful for competitors at both ends of the leash, but they should be pure enjoyment for spectators. Take time to visit all the vendors, watch both people and dogs — the people are often more interesting — and find where the obedience competition is for a change from the "beauty show" aspect of the larger event.

The American Kennel Club sanctions the majority of dog competitions. To find an upcoming show in your area, use the events search function on the AKC's Web site (www.akc.org).

Many smaller dog shows are free for spectators, but larger ones usually charge admission and possibly even parking, depending on the venue. The events listings of local newspapers usually will have information on start times and admission prices for larger shows. Typically, judging starts at 8 a.m. and culminates with Group and Best in Show competitions in late afternoon.

The dog-watching, people-watching and goody-buying last all day. ■

To adopt a pet

These are just a few of the many dogs and cats available at Lee County Animal Services, 5600 Banner Drive, Fort Myers. Call 432-2083 or visit the agency's Web site at www.leelostpets.com. Adoption applications may be downloaded from the site or completed at the shelter, which is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Please use the animal's ID number when inquiring about it. The adoption fee is \$65 for dogs and \$50 for cats.

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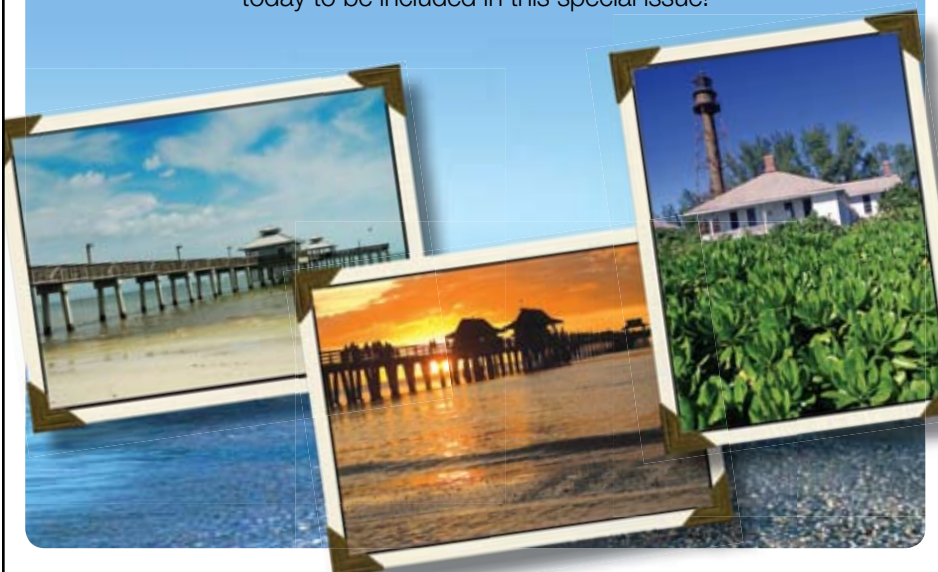
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The 14,000 sq ft Community Center will be located on Hagie Drive (off of Gladiolus Drive), on a five acre parcel gifted to us by an anonymous donor. Once built, Lee County Parks & Recreation will operate and maintain the Community Center in partnership with The Heights Foundation and the Harlem Heights Improvement Association.

Upon completion, The Community Center's Education Center and Performing Arts Hall will offer the following:

- Dance classes and productions
- Drama classes and Theater productions
- English classes and Literacy programs
- GED classes
- Medical screenings
- Drawing and Painting classes
- Gymnastics and Martial Arts classes
- Computer and Life-Skill classes
- Certified Training for kitchen prep workers
- Senior Center with daily hot lunch

The estimated construction cost of the Community Center is over \$4 million. "WE'RE ON A MISSION" to raise those funds.

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