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August 12, 2007
Sunday Gazette-Mail
Charleston, West Virginia

Master class

Dog owners get a few pointers on pet safety

By Kellen Henry
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Pets in Kanawha County can breathe a little easier thanks to the Magic Valley Kennel Club.

The group gave pet-friendly oxygen masks to the Charleston and Sissonville fire departments during a "responsible dog ownership" demo at Magic Island on Saturday.

Emergency workers encounter more pets overcome by smoke inhalation than humans, said Sissonville firefighter and instructor Tom Miller.

"We're glad to do anything we can to help the public," he said. "Most people consider their pets part of the family."

Charleston's medical supervisor Greg Spainhour said the Charleston Fire Department already had one set of pet masks. Sissonville's department didn't have any. Though animals can use masks made for humans, the pet masks are contoured to fit over snouts, and each set has masks in three sizes.

"We just want to make sure they have everything they need to help our pets," said event coordinator Kim Rowley as she presented the masks, flanked by her Dalmatian, Marcus. The group has donated bullet- and stab-resistant protective vests to area K-9 units in the past.

Saturday's demo gave owners and dogs the chance to have some fun outside, but they also

went home with educational resources, said Magic Valley Club President Gene McDonald. (The Kanawha Obedience Training Club helped with the event.)

"If you have responsible pet owners, you don't have problem dogs running the streets, being

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picked up and put in shelters," McDonald said.

Buying a dog is not a commitment to be taken lightly, he said.

"You have to study the breed and decide what is good for you," McDonald said. "You can't just go out and choose a cute puppy you see in the window."

An American Kennel Club-sanctioned match with breed, obedience and rally categories ran throughout the day. Representatives from area groups staffed information tables around the match arena.

"Dogs are more than something to tie in your backyard. With K-9 search and rescue and obedience training, dogs can have a function."

Kim Rowley, pet event organizer

The Kanawha County Humane Association shared information about low-cost spay and neuter programs.

"Spay and neuter is the number-one priority," said volunteer Laura Beard. She said pet adoptions have increased in the last year, but so have intakes and euthanasia.

Cheryl Brannon presented pet first-aid information on behalf of the American Red Cross, including tips to keep animals healthy during a heat wave. Pet owners should learn to perform CPR and treat injuries for their animals.

"There is no 911 to call here for pets, and you need to be able to stabilize the animal until you get to the vet," she said.

She also recommended making a disaster plan for pets so they will stay safe during emergencies and evacuations.

Members of the West Virginia K-9 Search & Rescue unit participated by demonstrating how they trail scents to help law enforcement or rescue groups statewide.

Volunteers and their dogs train between 10 and 20 hours a week to take on as many as 30 missions a year.



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Carol Kraft leads her Irish water spaniel, Troon, in a practice run for the obedience competition Saturday.

"They don't think of it as a job, but they do it well and find it rewarding. It uses a lot of their natural instincts," said Jeff Cunningham, who started volunteering when his dog Andy was a puppy.

Rowley hopes that the event will encourage pet owners to make smart choices about pet ownership and then take personal responsibility for their dog's well-being.



Kim Rowley gives pet oxygen masks to Charleston Fire Department medical supervisor Greg Spainhour. Sissonville Fire Department instructor Tom Miller holds a set of masks as he watches with Rowley's Dalmatian, Marcus.

"We've tried to show what dogs can really do," Rowley said. "Dogs are more than something to lie in your backyard. With K-9 search and rescue and obedience training, dogs can have a function."

The Magic Valley Kennel Club is an all-breed conference club

formed in 1950 that serves the Kanawha Valley. It hosts obedience classes, dog events and two shows during the year. Visit www.magicvalleykennelclub.com for more information.

To contact staff reporter Kellen Henry, use e-mail or call 348-5100.



Anne Sizemore practices with Quinn, her soft-coated Wheaten terrier, at a pet-ownership demo Saturday on Magic Island, with Connie Blake of the Kanawha Obedience Training Club watching.

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Event organizer Kim Rowley brought along her toy fox terrier, Missy.