

CORN MAZES TO ATTRACT BIG CROWDS IN TRUMBUL

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Trap Falls Kennel Club
event reminds dog owners
that owning a dog has both
a fun and serious side

By EILEEN FISCHER
Staff writer

Stay Roll over. Shake hands. Who doesn't appreciate a well-mannered canine? But it takes some effort on the part of the owner to have a dog that is happy and behaves. As Chris Sweetwood, of Milford, a board member of the Trap Falls Kennel Club, said, "There's no such thing as a bad dog, but there are bad owners."

To remedy that situation, the American Kennel Club annually sponsors a national Responsible Dog Ownership Day during September. With 73 million dogs in this country, that's a lot of owners to educate. Doing its part, the Trap Falls chapter is hosting one on Sept. 20 with Sweetwood as chairman of the free event. The day's goal, according to a press release, is to educate first-time dog owners and help current owners enhance their relationships with their pets.

"I think people have forgotten there's two ends to the leash — one to the dog, one to the human being," said Sweetwood, a retired military man.

One of the first steps to being a responsible owner is to recognize what a big undertaking it is, he said.

"It's not like a buying a car," he said. "A dog is a long-term commitment, emotionally and financially. They become part of your home."

He and his partner, Lauren Friedman, have belonged to the Trap Falls club, which has

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about 70 members, for several years and own two Spinone Italianos — sporting dogs with naturally sociable and patient dispositions, according to the AKC Web site — that have quite a resume. Not only do Siena and Drago go hunting, but Siena is a therapy dog with more than 350 visits to patients to her credit and both are reader dogs at the Stratford Library.

Sweetwood said he grew up with dogs and said one of the most important decisions a potential dog owner makes is which breed to choose. With 158 breeds, not every one fits every lifestyle, he said.

The AKC, which promotes purebred dogs, recommends pure breeds "because you know what you're going to get," said Sweetwood.

On Sept. 20, attendees will have a chance to "Meet the Breed" with members showing off 30 different ones.

Once you've chosen which canine fits your family, take the dog to a veterinarian to make sure the dog's healthy, he said.

Even before you bring your pet home, try to dog-proof it, he said.

"Close closet doors so shoes are away — puppies do chew — and take vases or books off bottom shelves," he said.

He also noted that vaccinations should be kept current, adhere to local leash laws and teach your dog basic manners, because "not everyone loves your dog as much as you do," he said.

And, this is important, pick up after your dog, Sweetwood said. "Yes, it's biodegradable, but not in 10 minutes."

To help owners even more, the kennel club offers regular obedience training classes, said Margie Miles, of Shelton, the obedience chairwoman. Beginner classes



Scott Vojtek, top, of Stratford, commands his dog Delana to stay during obedience training at Echo Hose Fire Department in Shelton. Left, Noah Barnes, of Shelton, works with his dog Bo.

Autumn Pinette/
Staff photographer

Club hosts Responsible Dog Ownership Day

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are Monday and Wednesday nights at the Echo Hose firehouse in Shelton.

"People will learn to bond with their dog," said Miles about the classes. They also teach basic commands.

The most common question trainers hear, she said, is "My dog jumps, what do I do?"

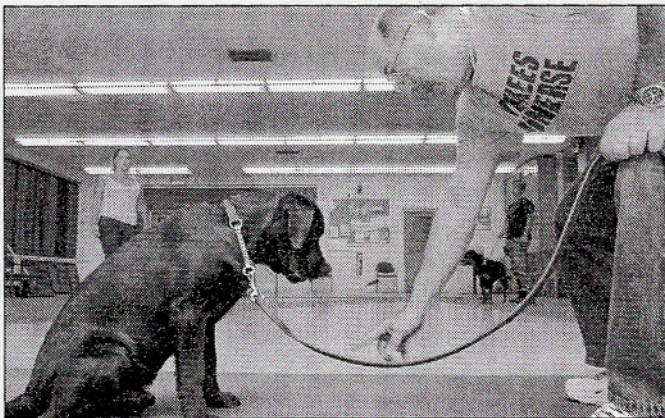
"Trainers will discuss and teach how to correct [the dog] for a better relationship," Miles said.

At the Sept. 20th event, dogs can take a canine good citizen test. Details on what they should know are on the AKC Web site, www.akc.org.

Earning the award can be money in your pocket, according to Sweetwood, because most insurance companies will offer a reduction on homeowner's insurance if your dog passes, he said.

Oronoque Animal Hospital will offer a micro-chip clinic for \$35 and there will be vendors displaying pet products, as well.

On the fun side, contests will take place for the Best Kisser, Most Obedient, Best



Autumn Pinette/ Staff photographer

Joe Donnarumma tries to get his 6-month-old chocolate lab Seamus to lie down during obedience training at Echo Hose Fire Department in Shelton.

Tail Wagger and Best Trick.

All breeds are welcome, even mixed, said Miles, the owner of seven dogs. "I have quite a few mutts myself."

First Selectman Raymond Baldwin Jr. will designate Sept. 20 as AKC Responsible Dog Ownership Day on Thursday at 2 p.m. at Trumbull Town Hall. All are welcome.

The Trap Falls Kennel Club will host the AKC sponsored Responsible Dog Ownership Day on Sept. 20 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Old Mine Park, Routes 25

and 111 in Trumbull. For a specific schedule of events, visit www.trapfalls.org.

Similar events will take place on Sept. 27 at these locations: Best Friends Pet Care, 227 Cheshire Road, Bethany, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Call 393-3126. And at Best Friends Pet Care, 520 Main Ave., Norwalk, from noon to 4 p.m. Call 849-1010.

To learn more about beginning and intermediate dog training classes, call Margie Miles at 924-2985 or visit the Web site.