

Can you really resist cute faces like these?

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Petapalooza: Adopt a pet while having some fun, getting educated

By KATHY KIRBY

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Petapalooza -- the word itself sounds like a lot of fun.

Set for 1-5 p.m. Saturday at the Delaware County Fairgrounds, the pet education and adoption fair will include agility demonstrations, a kissing booth, and contests like best eyes, best kisser, mystery mutt, best wag, best trick, best smile, best singer and celebrity look-alike.

But there also will be a serious side to the festivities.

About 200 kittens, dogs, rabbits and other small animals -- from more than 25 shelter and rescue organizations -- will be there, all of them needing adoptive homes.

"Petapalooza is the perfect opportunity to speak for those who can't speak for themselves," commented Linda Bir-Con, director of the New Castle-Henry County Animal Shelter.

Pets from her facility will include Charlie, a beagle; Ellie, a fox terrier, and Max, a shepherd mix.

"We also will have a huge, fat, really cool cat named Smudge," she said. "Smudge is up for adoption because the pet owner had allergies."

Petapalooza is coordinated by the Unconditional Love Foundation. Jill Dolon, animal-control officer for Delaware County, is president and founder of the foundation.

"We hope Petapalooza will bring attention to our common goal of ending the killing of millions of animals each year simply because they are homeless, as well as educate the public on other important animal-welfare issues," she said.

For instance, people don't have to go to a breeder to get a purebred dog, according to Dolon.

"Nationwide, 30 percent of the dogs in animal shelters are purebred," she said. "We want to get rid of the pound concept -- animal shelters don't just take animals and kill them. We take them in and work to find them homes."

Dolon spoke of recent arrests made in Delaware County for dog fighting.

"We will have a special booth set up that focuses on dog fighting so that the community can become educated as to the signs and what to do if they suspect someone might be involved," she said.

The Linda Blair Worldheart Foundation is one of the event's sponsors. Information on that foundation will be available at the dog-fighting booth.

Dolon met Blair five years ago on the Good Day L.A. (Los Angeles) Show when Blair was a guest and Dolon was a producer and director.

Blair "is taking a very hands-on approach to making positive changes in the world of animal and human welfare, and I feel very privileged that she is lending her voice to the animals right here in Delaware County," Dolon said.

Some of the other issues addressed at Petapalooza will include pet overpopulation, feral cats, puppy mills, pet theft, licensing and proper pet care.

Dolon's own foundation will be accepting applications for its Spay Neuter Assistance Program to help low-income pet owners afford the procedures.

A microchip clinic will be conducted by Westview Animal Clinic, according to Kate Dwenger, office manager.

"The microchips are placed under the skin of the dog or cat for identification purposes," she said.

The service is free; however, there will be a \$10 registration fee.

Food and tickets to win various prizes also will be for sale at the event. Proceeds will benefit the Unconditional Love Foundation and the New Castle Animal Shelter.

And what if you're not interested in a companion animal at this time?

Adoption also will be available for wild or exotic animals, like an alligator, bobcat, hawk, spider monkey, llama, mountain lion, wolf, jaguar, python, black bear, African lion, zebra, tiger and more.

Contact feature writer Kathy Kirby at 213-5821.

Check this out

What: Petapalooza: a pet education and adoption fair.

When: 1-5 p.m. Saturday.

Where: Delaware County Fairgrounds, 1210 N. Wheeling Ave.

Coordinator: Unconditional Love Foundation.

Sponsors: Best Friends Animal Society, Linda Blair and the Linda Blair Worldheart Foundation, Animal Wellness Magazine, Alley Cat Allies, Millennium Productions, Westview Animal Clinic, Delaware County Commissioners.

Information: Jill Dolon, president of Unconditional Love Foundation and Delaware County animal-control officer, 287-9043, cell (818) 693-2323, or ULoveResq@aol.com.

Pet ownership facts

- Sixty-three percent of all households in the United States -- more than 69 million -- have a pet. That's up from 64 million in 2002 and 51 million in 1988.

- Americans own about 73 million dogs, 90 million cats, 139 million freshwater fish, 9 million saltwater fish, 16 million birds, 18 million small animals and 11 million reptiles.

- Nearly all pet owners say companionship, love, company and affection are the top benefits to owning a pet.

- Fifty-nine percent of pet owners say pets are good for their health and help them relax. Forty percent say that owning a dog motivates them to exercise on a regular basis.

- Three-quarters of dog owners consider their dog like a child or family member and more than half of cat owners say the same.

Source: News release e-mailed from the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, www.appma.org, citing facts from its 2005-2006 National Pet Owners Survey.

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