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South Bend Tribune

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Mutt March raises funds for Pet Refuge

HOMETOWN

By LISA KOCHANOWSKI
Tribune Correspondent

Dogs of all sizes, ages and breeds -- with their owners in tow -- came together for a howling time at the third annual Michiana Mutt March at Howard Park.

This walk is a fund-raiser for Pet Refuge, a not-for-profit, no-kill facility in Mishawaka that helps stray and unwanted animals find loving families.

Co-chairpersons Paula Keswick and Pennie Christie were happy with the outcome of the recent event, and delighted to see more than 300 people participate -- most of whom were tagging along behind their dogs.

The one-mile walk at Howard Park in South Bend raised more than \$27,000 this year. The funds will go toward medical treatment of the animals, costs for the building and food for all animals.

"I think it was just great," said Keswick.

"Considering the economy, it was phenomenal. We had great presenters come out and had lots of contests."

Keswick was very grateful to all sponsors, especially the top sponsors of Gabriele Eye Institute and radio station Sunny 101.5 FM. The top individual money-raiser for the past three years has been Joyce Pinkerton, who collected \$1,600 individually and was part of the RACO team that raised more than \$2,000.

Pet owners of all ages enjoyed the chance to bring their dogs out and mingle with other pet owners.



Ellie Eastman, 14, Maddie Eastman, 12, Beth Williams, 13, and Carla Geglio, 11, take a lunch break with Sunny, Beth's dog that she adopted from Pet Refuge. The girls all participated in the third annual Michiana Mutt March and raised \$100 for the event.

Tribune Photo LISA KOCHANOWSKI



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"It's nice to get outside. It's something close and it draws people out," said Brenda Leonardo of South Bend, who brought her 8-month-old Chihuahua terrier mix, Boogie Bear.

The animal had been very sick recently but pulled through, and Leonardo thought a great way to celebrate would be to participate in the walk.

The Bokon family of South Bend is a huge supporter of the Pet Refuge organization and brought along their Akita Samoan mix, Wizard.

"My wife, Kelly, adopted Wizard from Pet Refuge and she likes to contribute whenever she can," said Scott Bokon.

The Bokons brought their other dog, Sadie, whom they got from a sheltie rescue, and their 2 1/2-year-old daughter, Cassie, to the event.

"I really enjoyed it," said Kelly Bokon. "It's a real benefit and a neat idea. This was the first year we walked."

A foursome from South Bend joined the event because their friend Beth Williams, 13, got her cocker spaniel, Sunny, from the shelter and they thought it would be good to do something to help raise money.

"It's for Pet Refuge and we wanted to help out," said Maddie Eastman, 12.

"We got over \$100," commented 11-year-old Carla Geglio, who said the four girls simply went out and asked people to donate money to the event.

Williams said that during the march they ran into Sunny's brother, who was also at the shelter at one time, and she thought it was funny how they recognized each other but didn't seem all that interested.

"If you can help out the community and it only takes an hour of your life, it's worth it," said Geglio.

This was the first time any of the girls had done this, but they are planning to return in upcoming years.

"I really like dogs and the money helps out dogs in the area," said 14-year-old Ellie Eastman.

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