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Dockdogs leap into canine water activity

(by Joan Demirjian - September 23, 2009)



Dockdogs leap into canine water activity

By JOAN DEMIRJIAN

Bainbridge resident Marie Goodwin and her dog, Jack, are participants in one of the fastest growing activities in the dog world called dock jumping. They are members of the Buckeye Dockdogs.

Jack is a certified therapy dog, visiting hospitals and interacting with autistic children. The dog relaxes and has fun by jumping off docks into water to catch his toys.

In dock diving, dogs take leaps from a dock into water to catch a toy or other object. They are judged on length and heights of their jumps.

Ms. Goodwin said the black Labrador retriever loves the sport so much, he already has a master's title in "big air" in jumping and

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speed retrieve.

"Jack's a working dog, looking for fun things to do," Ms. Goodwin said. "He loves water and toys."

She said she got involved after reading about Buckeye Dockdogs and decided to try it.

Tina McLaughlin, president of Buckeye Dockdogs, founded the group in 2007. Her Chesapeake Bay retriever, Ellie, loves the sport, she said.

They were at the Northeast Ohio Sportsman Show last weekend.

All breeds and sizes can enjoy the sport, from Chihuahuas to great danes, as well as mixed breeds. There is even a "lap dog" category, she said.

They all have to have a "toy drive" and like to swim.

Ms. McLaughlin said dogs in the club include a Boston terrier, Jack Russell, Norfolk terrier and mixed breeds. Many are rescued dogs. "They are enjoying life to the fullest now," she said.

In competition, a 28,000-gallon, 40-foot-long swimming pool and a 40-foot dock are used. Buckeye Dockdogs practice at Forever Friends Pet Center in Grafton in Lorain County.

Buckeye Dockdogs compete and give demonstrations throughout Ohio and other states. One of the more recent events was at Canine Fun Day at the Cleveland Metroparks Polo Field in Moreland Hills.

They are looking for a practice site in Geauga County where a property owner would lend them a lake and dock to practice in, Ms. Goodwin said.

In dockdog competition, big air is the long jump equivalent for canine athletes. At speeds over 20 mph, dogs catapult off the end of a 40-foot dock into a pool to retrieve a floatable object, such as their favorite toy.

Jump distances are measured from the end of the dock to where the base of the dog's tail breaks the water.

Extreme vertical is scored on how high the

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dogs jump. The runs are shorter and speed is reduced in order to achieve maximum height about 8 feet from the dock where an object, called a bumper, is suspended from a pole over the water.

Speed retrieve is a sport for all canines. Each dog, racing against the clock, runs, jumps, swims and retrieves an object located on an extender at the end of the pool, at a distance of 58 feet from the 20-foot mark on the dock.

Ms. Goodwin said she started with Jack earlier this year and he averages 22 1/2 feet in his jump.

"There's no training involved, you throw a toy and he jumps for it. and it's all about having fun," she said. "That's why I do it for Jack who works hard at being a therapy dog. It's an outlet for us to have fun."

There are categories for dogs 6 months old to 7 years and for veterans.

About 99 percent of the dogs trying it succeed, Ms. Goodwin said. Everyone can win, Ms. Goodwin said. There are ribbons for novice, amateur, senior, master and super elite.

There are even categories for young people, 7 years old to 18 years old. "It's user friendly," Ms. Goodwin said.

"We compete, but it's all about fun," she said. "And they don't have to have web feet.

"Sometimes it's difficult to get a dog to sit on the dock because they want to go in so bad," Ms. Goodwin said. "They are like planes taking off," she said. Even a Jack Russell terrier can jump over 20 feet.

There are no shock, choke or prong collars used, and the dog has to go in on his own accord. There is no pushing and shoving.

"They just have a really, really good time," Ms. Goodwin said. People are always looking for things to do with their dogs, and active, working dogs get into less trouble, she said.

Ms. Goodwin trains dogs for therapy, "Canine Good Citizenship" and the "Tricks for Treats" program, training at people's houses and at specific locations.

Some of the members of Buckeye Dockdogs

are taking part in a fund-raising effort, "Chase Away Canine Cancer," for the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine Foundation. Jack will compete in Dockdogs Nationals at Kings Island near Cincinnati with dogs from around the world.

Pledges will be collected for every inch he jumps. All donations will be given to the foundation's research, education and service.

For more information, call Ms. Goodwin at (216) 854-1260.

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