

Canines get dressed to the nines at festival

Thousands check out contests, offerings of Dog Days of Summer

07:17 AM CDT on Sunday, June 5, 2005

By AVA THOMAS BENSON / Staff Writer

Denton's annual Dog Days of Summer was almost like Halloween for dogs Saturday: tricks, treats and costumes.

Dogs came ready for their day adorned in pink boas, poodle skirts, hats, sunglasses and other costumes.

Kim Killough brought her Chihuahua and toy poodle to the festival showing their "Star Wars" spirit, dressed as Yoda and Princess Leia. The normally light-colored Chihuahua had even been dyed green with food coloring for the event.

"We just painted him with a paintbrush and he just stood there," Killough said.

She said the family had considered the dye job for St. Patrick's Day, but opted to dress the dogs up for the Dog Days festival. The dogs both wore robes, Yoda had a small glow-stick for a lightsaber, and Leia had the appropriate toy poodle hair to mimic the "Star Wars" princess.



Gary Payne / DRC

Deacon, a 4-year-old bloodhound, gets some help from Chuck Roedema in showing off what won him the longest ears contest during the Dog Days of Summer festival on Saturday.

Some patrons carried smaller pets in pouches worn like a backpack, but on their fronts, while most everyone else sniffed their way across the lawns. Kieran, a 160-pound Irish wolfhound, was led by 7-year-old Madolyn McPhail, but didn't always find it easy to make his way through the crowds. Kieran won contests for having the

longest tail and being the largest dog. Kieran, 3 feet tall at his shoulder, is so large no other owners bothered to enter their dogs into the largest dog competition.

Sugar, a Chihuahua-Daschund mix, enjoyed the day perched on her owner Michael Hanselman's shoulders. Hanselman said the dog started sitting on his shoulders on car trips when she couldn't sit in his lap and now refuses to sit anywhere else or let him carry her.

"She started doing this when she was younger, and now she weighs more and I wish she didn't want to be up there," Hanselman joked. "She's got a good sense of balance — I can lean back, bend over, sit down, stand up — she just stays up there."

Now in its 12th year, Dog Days of Summer is an event inspired by the Denton Arts & Jazz Festival. Julie Glover, Downtown Development manager, said she got the idea at the fest when she noticed that everyone had brought their canine companions.

"I don't even have dogs — I have three cats," Glover laughed. "But I saw how many people had brought their dogs and I thought, 'We really need something just for this.'"

Christine Gossett, marketing specialist for the Main Street Association, said she estimates at least 10,000 people stopped by the Dog Days event, along with anywhere from 4,000 to 5,000 dogs and other pets. Gossett said attendees had come from all over the Dallas-Fort Worth area, as well as Beaumont, El Paso, Wichita Falls and Oklahoma.

She said by late afternoon the event had gone off without any dogfights or other trouble, and she said response had been great.

"Not many communities wrap themselves around an event like this," Gossett said. "Denton is just so accepting of this event and it's a dog-friendly town."

Temperatures reached nearly 90, but a breeze helped keep owners and their dogs fairly cool. The warm weather meant plenty of dogs were showing off their tongues, but none as well as area celebrity Puggy, who was on hand with his owner, Becky Stanford, to enjoy the day.

Puggy, who is well known as the Dog Days "longest tongue" champion, has a 7-inch-long tongue that hangs nearly to the ground when the small dog stands up. Stanford said Puggy was a stray, but she believes he's a Pekingese.

Last year, Stanford and Puggy visited the show, but this year decided to rent booth space for Puggy's tongue-wear — a line of T-shirts, mouse pads and other items featuring the animal. The pair does shows, entertains children and has auditioned for "The Tonight Show" with Jay Leno, Stanford said.

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