

Dogs take over the arena at Paws in the SARC



By Brock Weir

Paws in the Park is so 2017; this year, Aurora's four-legged friends are movin' on up, setting up shop at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex this Saturday for the first annual Paws in the SARC.

A celebration of Aurora's love affair with dogs, the event will feature a number of family friendly activities for the whole family and a chance to learn all about the local products and services available for your pooch.

This will be the third PAWS event spearheaded by the Town of Aurora, but after two years of less-than-favourable weather at Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area, the Town decided to bring things indoors, filling the SARC's west arena to the brim with vendors, products, and services, and even an agility contest and entertainment provided by the internationally renowned Ruff Sport. Spearheaded by local Animal Control Officer Brad Dewar, Paws in the SARC coincides with the first year Aurora has brought its animal control services in-house.

?Prior to that, animal control was always contracted outside and Paws in the Park was done by a third party,? explains Mr. Dewar. ?Weather in the month of May is always unknown, so it did dampen the success of the event, being outside with some bad weather. The event now being done by the Town of Aurora, so we have looked at that and we have made the move forward to bring it in-house. It is better for the pets, it is better for our vendors and we look forward to a little more engagement with the community having it indoors.?

The event, he said, also affords them a chance to educate members of the public on municipal animal control bylaws such as the requirements of pet owners if you happen to have a dog or a cat.

"Licensing is a big aspect of that, so we will be working with DocuPets who will be here," says Mr. Dewar. "Anyone who doesn't have their 2018 license can register right away and get it mailed to them. That is a partnership between the Town and DocuPets to create a little bit more accessibility for our community members. We are about education, working with our community, getting to know our community members, and then we have our vendors.

"We have an opportunity to promote some of the businesses within the Town of Aurora that are specific to the animal industry. That varies from St. John's Ambulance, which does support with therapy dogs; then we will have pet stores and grooming. We'll have veterinarians and we will have some entertainment: The Ruff Dogs and Ruff Sports agility. They will be doing four shows throughout the day and in their off time they will do one on one training with anyone who is interested. They can bring your dog in if you are having some challenges, whether it is walking on a lead or whatnot, or even getting into a vehicle."

PFaff Motors, he adds, is a big sponsor of Paws in the SARC and they will have a vehicle on site to aid in training your dog to get safely in and out of a vehicle.

"All in all, this is a community-oriented event," he says. "It is about engaging the community, getting to know each other, and letting them know what services are provided by the municipality. We're also going to have partners as well: some from mental health workers as well as York Regional Police. It is all about that engagement and working in partnership."

Mr. Dewar began his career in Animal Control a little over eight years ago, working with the OSPCA, first as an agent investigating various cases such as animal cruelty, balancing that job with his role as a contracted animal control officer to the Town of Aurora. Later, his career turned to investigations side and then with the OSPCA's media department for five years.

He was part of their in-house training unit, training OSPCA officers in the tools of the trade, including how to read the body language of animals when dealing with a call, and the execution of warrants.

"I thoroughly enjoy engaging with the community," he says. "I love just simply having a chat, whether it is about talking about what [bylaw] changes have occurred, or sometimes the negative side of an animal that unfortunately gets away from its owner, it's running at large, it is displaced from its home, that is something that does happen. As an officer, we're able to try and reunite that animal back to the owner.

"If we can do that without having to bring it into the shelter, that is our primary goal. We will exhaust every opportunity possible to get an animal back home, and that is the rewarding side because we get an animal that was displaced, temporarily, and get it back to its family where it belongs."

This week, focus is on Paws in the SARC, which runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sold out as far as vendors are concerned, Mr. Dewar and the department are eager to gauge the reaction from attendees to see how the event can grow in the future.

"We'll see where it goes," he says. "We might likely be using two arenas because the more interest we get from the public, the more we want to make it a benefit to the community."