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Dogs Have Their Day During Sherman Event

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SHERMAN — Did you know that the competitive event Fast CAT has nothing to do with cats? Rather, it is a 100-yard dash for dogs.

Area youth had the opportunity to gather and learn about dog competitions, as well as basic handling techniques during a Dog Sports Day. The event was held from 2 to 4 p.m. on Aug. 1 at The K9 Complex in Sherman, hosted by Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chautauqua County 4-H.

The Dog Sports Day was made possible through a grant awarded by Nestle Purina which is being used for new agility equipment for the 4-H program, entries for youth in an AKC Fast CAT event, and four educational sessions.

Partners include The K9 Complex, The Pointer and the Pin, Lake Effect Disc Dogs, the Conewango Valley Kennel Club and the Chautauqua County Humane Society.

The K9 Complex owner, Christine McKay explained the event was meant to be largely instructional for youth seeking to learn more about dog sports and learn basic dog training techniques.

"The goal is to introduce these kids to different dog sports and give them some



Dog owners listen to instructions for the Fast CAT competition during a dog sports day at The K9 Complex in Sherman.

basic skills they can take home and practice with their own dogs," she said.

McKay went on to explain that this event was an educational session to help participants enter and compete in dog sports. "Competition is healthy for dogs, especially doing things that are complex," she said. "Many sports challenge the dog and handler to compete by reaching their personal best, rather than to beat other people."

Youth began the day with an introduction to the basics of dog training, then rotated through demonstrations of Agility, Fast CAT, Scent Work, Disc, and Barn Hunt with a short demonstration of how to start training their dog at home for each sport.

According to a press release from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Chautauqua County 4-H, the free training session "was geared for youth in kindergarten through 12th grades, even those who are not currently 4-H members."

Lynne Wahlstrom, 4-H Community Educator of the CCE of Chautauqua County, said that the grant being offered was to renovate dog shelters. "We did not have a shelter to renovate, but we can keep dogs out of the shelters if we train our dogs and kids," she said. "So, I wrote the grant application from that angle. I was very surprised when they reached out and said we would get \$20,000."

The CCE of Chautauqua County 4-H also noted that participants had the opportunity to make a dog toy to take home and

one to donate to the Chautauqua County Humane Society. They learned about competing in Fast CAT, and had an opportunity to sign up for the next educational session to try Dock Diving, Fast CAT, Canine Good Citizen, and Farm Dog with their dogs.

Patrick Walker, lifetime member of the Conewango Valley Kennel Club, served as Hunt Master for the event demonstration. Dogs will run anywhere between 20-30mph and the Hunt Master's job is to coordinate the activity and ensure the safety of the dog, the handler and the operator. Before the dog is released, he calls out: "Operator ready? Handler ready? Tally-ho," which is the signal to let the dog go.

"I have the best seat in the house. I get to see all the dogs," Walker said. "It's exciting to give these kids an opportunity to do things with their dogs."

The youth who signed up for the Fast CAT entry through the Nestle Purina grant will run their dogs at the Conewango Valley Kennel Club's annual Fast CAT event being held Sept. 5 to 7 at the Chautauqua County Fairgrounds in Dunkirk. Although non-entered dogs are not permitted on the competition site, the public is encouraged to attend and watch the entered dogs run at this event.



Patrick Walker, Hunt Master for the event demonstration, calls 'tally ho' and a dog is released on the Fast CAT track.