

DOGPAW holds cleanup at Vancouver dog park

Volunteers tackle Ike Memorial Dog Park projects

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8 Photos



Volunteer Mary Carling, left, and former DOGPAW president Eileen Cervantes help dig a trench on Saturday at Ike Memorial Dog Park in Vancouver. DOGPAW held its volunteer cleanup Saturday, as more than a dozen volunteers dug a trench to help filter water away from some of the muddier spots of the park. (Joshua Hart/The Columbian)

Ted Healy got the best of all worlds Saturday at the place he calls the best dog park in the region.

Healy is recently retired and a self-proclaimed “dog park connoisseur” who routinely drives from Portland to Ike Memorial Park three times a week with his 6-year-old rescue lab, Sprite. The frequent visitor turned volunteer Saturday for the first time to give back to the place he and Sprite enjoy on every trip.

“This is such a gift to the community,” Healy said. “Now that I’m retired — I’ll probably come here more often.”

Saturday was the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began that DOWPAW, the nonprofit organization that maintains dog parks around Clark County, held their Park Beautification Day. It's a monthly rotating event in which volunteers spent part of their day cleaning up one of the four dog parks managed by DOGPAW.

About 15 volunteers did various duties at Ike Memorial Park, including a group starting work on building a trench to help with water drainage at the park. The organization also is planning to upgrade the park's fencing in the future through fundraising efforts, treasurer Donna Clark said.

Plenty of volunteers, likely Healy from Portland, also were first-timers giving back to the park. So was Marty Rutkovitz of Battle Ground as a first-time park visitor. Rutkovitz, his wife and their two dogs, Priscilla and Lilybean, recently relocated to the Pacific Northwest from St. Louis, Mo. Rutkovitz spent part of Saturday with a shovel in hand digging holes for future fencing, and came away impressed at what Clark County has to offer for pet lovers.

"This Northwest atmosphere is fantastic as far as pet friendly," Rutkovitz said.

Popularity of the parks continues to grow as Clark County's population numbers climb, board president Sally Jenkins said. And throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the parks have become a sanctuary for pet owners and their pups.

That's why their volunteers continue to be a backbone of the organization that's 100 percent funded through sponsors, donations and memberships. The Clark County Council recently renewed its participation agreement with DOGPAW for ongoing support on maintenance. The organization provides most of the maintenance not covered by the county, including waste disposal, trash cleanup, maintaining bulletin boards and sponsor signage and maintenance of structures or improvements implemented by the organization.

That's why Jenkins and Clark are grateful for the volunteers' work, including those as Park Beautification Day.

"We're lucky people are coming out to work on it," Clark said. "We're having a good day."

More pictures from a glorious ***Dog Day Morning***...

