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Labor of (puppy) love



Peg and Greg Schmeer have spent years caring for Dakota Dog Park. They need a caring successor.

Dakota Dog Park was already bustling one recent Friday afternoon when Peg and Greg Schmeer arrived for their regular twice-weekly inspection, Greg said, to get the park ready for the weekend--when it's even busier.

"We have been here sometimes in the summer when there's 250 people and their dogs," Greg said. "It's just wall to wall dogs."

Peg and Greg lingered near the park's west gate for a time, urging visitors to move along so new arrivals could enter easily, and waiting for the Hirsh and Rick Santangelo--to join them. Hirsh and Santangelo have acted as deputy managers for a couple of years; the Schmeers have been here for four. But the passing years and accumulating health concerns have convinced the Schmeers the time is coming soon to hand off the reins. They don't mind the work, they insisted--but they want to make sure it keeps getting done.

Peg is 69 now, "and I'm the youngest one of us," she said. Greg is 75, and "I got some health problems," he said, before pointing toward his brother who's going to have a bypass operation in four days--and he's still here."

DOGPAW's park managers--the Schmeers at Dakota, Rick Shulenbarger at Lucky, and Ed Dorr and Marc Johnson at Ike--are an essential resource at the organization's off-leash parks, according to Eileen Cervantes, president of the DOGPAW board.



“I don’t know what we’d do without them,” Cervantes said. “The managers help keep the parks clean, by both picking up stray poops and trash more important, getting visitors to do it. They keep brush and limbs trimmed back from the trails and make minor repairs to the fences and gas dispensers filled and the billboards neat and current. They just do all kinds of things to make sure our parks are pleasant places to bring our dogs. When Greg first put on his park manager’s cap four years ago, cleaning up unclaimed dog piles was by far the biggest part of the job. It’s still there but things have gotten better. Now, he said, “there’s just 1 or 2 percent of the people who just won’t pick it up.”

These days, when Greg and Peg gather with their assistants at the gate early in the afternoon on Mondays and Fridays, they divvy up the job at the gate with the Schmeers’ two beagles, Peanut and Roxy, greeting visitors, answering newcomers’ questions, and promoting DOGPAW members. Rick might take his weed trimmer around the benches, trees, and shrubs to get the grass the county crews’ machines can’t reach. And Greg goes left on the north half of the park’s trail loop while Greg stalks off to the right, pulling his cart full of poop bags and tools.

They’re all doing it for the sake of the dog owners and their pets, the ones who get the most out of this valuable community resource.

“Let’s face it,” Laurie said. “Nobody really wants to pick up crap. But we want to keep the park clean and open. We do it for the dogs.”

The sight of frolicking, happy dogs is reward enough. But Greg said he also finds satisfaction in the gratitude of their owners. “I get a lot of the thanks of the park.’ And that helps a lot.”

He and Peg have gotten to know many of the regular visitors, too, he said. “Some of them I’ve seen a hundred times,” and many of them have. But while they’ll never stop coming to Dakota Dog Park, the time is coming soon when they’ll have to give up the manager role. They’ll miss it

“Oh gosh, yes,” she said. “I talk to the people, and everybody knows us, and we know them.”

Once they and DOGPAW have found a successor, Greg said, he'll turn over the manager's cap and go back to being a civilian, walking the co other happy owners. But he's pretty sure he won't be able to stop watching out for bits of trash and stray poops.

“I'm not going to leave this place unattended,” he said. “I'm just not going to do that. I wouldn't do that to Eileen, I wouldn't do that to DOGPAW Dakota. “I just love this park. I love the people. And I love the dogs.”



DOGPAW seeks managers, operations director

Keeping DOGPAW's off-leash parks clean and running smoothly is both satisfying and necessary--and the organization is always looking for according to Eileen Cervantes, president of the organization's board.

"We've got an outstanding crew of park managers, assistants, and volunteers who've already stepped up," Cervantes said. "But we, and they

backup. And what we really need now is help at board level to work even more closely with the individual managers.”

A director for operations would be responsible for coordinating with the managers to make sure each park has the equipment and supplies th clean and pleasant. Those duties would enable this board member to keep the board better informed on trends in park usage, ongoing proble needs across the organization or at individual parks.

“It’s a critical position, and one we’ve been trying to fill for some time now,” Cervantes said. “If you love our dog parks--like so many visitors, m board members do--and you want to make a real contribution to their smooth operation, this is the job for you. We’d love to hear from you.”

More information is available on the “volunteer” page at DOGPAW’s website, dogpawoffleashparks.org.

Offbeat opportunities

Know an amateur metalworker who likes to tinker? How about an attorney with a little time to spare? DOGPAW is looking for one of each.

The organization would like to replace its poop-bag dispensers with models that work better--that don’t jam up or leave bags out of reach insid some one-time legal help reviewing operating contracts with the city and county.

Interested? Contact Eileen Cervantes, president of the DOGPAW board, at president@dogpawoffleashparks.org.

Lucky’s turn

DOGPAW’s monthly volunteer cleanup makes its way to Lucky Dog Park on Saturday, Aug. 1.

Workers and friends will gather at the park at 10100 NE 149th St., Brush Prairie, starting at 10 a.m. that Saturday to spruce up this pleasant p Laretta Noreen Forest Preserve. Bring work gloves and garden tools and join us for a fun and productive morning.

For more information, contact Alicia Stevens, the DOGPAW board’s director for volunteers, at volunteer@dogpawoffleashparks.org.

DOGPAW OFF-LEASH DOG PARK LOCATIONS:

Dakota: 1515 N.E. 164th Ave. Vancouver, WA

Ike (Ross): 5167 N.E. 15th Ave. Vancouver, WA

Kane: 10910 N.E. 172nd Ave. Vancouver, WA

Lucky: 10100 N.E. 149th St. Brush Prairie, WA

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