

Pets, zombies haunt Dog Walk of the Dead

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BY JENNIFER JEAN MILLER
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Photo by Jake West/New Jersey Herald - Andy Schoonhen, 8, and Tommy Schoonhen, 12, join their dog, Didi, during the Dog Walk of the Dead fundraiser for One Step Closer Animal Rescue on Saturday at Sussex County Fairgrounds in Frankford

FRANKFORD -- Horror, hounds and Halloween came together at the Sussex County Fairgrounds on Saturday for the sixth annual Dog Walk of the Dead.

Dog owners and their four-legged companions were costumed for fun, food, festivities and fundraising, along with the event's traditional zombie dog walk. Event proceeds benefitted One Step Closer Animal Rescue (O.S.C.A.R.).

This was the third year the event was held at the fairgrounds, organizer Anthony Muzikar said. Muzikar said he and his wife Deann had first experienced the Asbury Park Zombie Walk when they were living in Montclair and the idea for the Dog Walk of the Dead was born.

The first eerie event took place in Montclair's Erie Park as New Jersey's inaugural zombie dog walk to benefit the Montclair Animal Shelter. In its third year, the event moved to Waterloo Village to benefit the Randolph Animal Shelter, before it transitioned to the Sussex County Fairgrounds. Muzikar said moving it to the fairgrounds ensured there was an ideal location in case of inclement weather. He noted though the weather conditions for the past events -- as it was on Saturday -- was excellent.

There were 45 vendors in attendance on Saturday, ranging in categories from horror to pet to lifestyle to culture with wares for sale. WDHA radio broadcasted live from the location, with prize giveaways and other fun. Every hour winners were chosen for the costume contest for best costumes in the adult, child and dog categories. Zombies prettied up for the Zombie Pin-up Girl contest. A classic car show and the Classic Car Trunk or Treat were on the grounds, with kids able to grab candy as they checked out the cars with their parents and pups.

Jessica Criscuolo, of Franklin, attended with her husband, Dave, and brindle-colored pitbull, Kona. Outfitted as a UPS delivery person carrying a package, Kona was interested in the other dogs passing by and the sights and sounds of the event.

"This is nice. We'll definitely be coming back," Criscuolo said.

It was also the Blairstown Museum's first time as an event vendor. The organization had some of its "Friday the 13th" collection on display.

"This is great," said Jeanette Iurato, owner and curator of the museum. "I wasn't expecting this many attendees."

One aspect that impressed Iurato was the event's spirit, with the costume themes the dog owners coordinated with their pets.

Cassie Kowalchuk, founder of O.S.C.A.R., was appreciative of the outpouring of support to the organization. Each adult entry gave a \$3 donation. A hearse was filled with supplies for the foundation. Pet Valu in Hackettstown and Angry Erik Brewing in Lafayette were the sponsors -- Angry Erik provided giveaway bags for the event.

No dogs up for adoption were at the dog walk event, Kowalchuk said, but several adoptions took place on Saturday at the group's shelter on Sparta-Stanhope Road in Andover. Pet Valu in Hackettstown will host a pet adoption event and supply drive for O.S.C.A.R. at its location at 1930 Route 57 on Oct. 27 from noon to 2 p.m., Kowalchuk said.

Jennifer Jean Miller can be reached by phone at: 973-383-1230; and on Facebook: www.Facebook.com/JMillerNJH.