

Million Paws Walk

I'm writing to you because our major national fundraising event, the 13th annual Million Paws Walk is fast approaching.

In 2005, around 35,000 people and 25,000 animals took part at over 60 different walk locations all over Australia, and we certainly expect this year to be bigger and better than ever.

The Million Paws Walk (sponsored by Hill's Pet Nutrition) is a great day out for all creatures great and small – including dogs, cats, ferrets, horses and even a few brave cats! It's a fun outdoors event where party animals can go wild, or those dog-tired at the end of the day can stroll around as slow as a snail.

More importantly however the Million Paws Walk is an important fundraising event for the RSPCA. Funds raised through entry fees and the sale of merchandise help assist the vital work of the RSPCA in caring for and protecting more than 135,000 animals every year.

The 2006 RSPCA Million Paws Walk will be held on Sunday 21 May in all states except WA, where it will be held earlier on 30 April to avoid the increased likelihood of rain that occurs in May.

This year, those participating in the Walk can wear bright blue 'stop animal cruelty' wristbands, with a little heart shaped doggie tag to match. In most states the walk is led off by dogs that have been rescued from cruelty and neglect and rehabilitated with the help of the RSPCA – they are identified by special blue dog coats that are all made by a pair of dedicated volunteers.

In addition to the Walk itself, participants enjoy a real festival atmosphere on the day, with entertainment, vet checks, displays, a great variety of food and drinks, and free demonstrations.

Individuals, families, community groups or corporate teams will treat their "best friends" to the day out of the year while helping to support the vital work of the RSPCA and non-pet owners are also welcome.

We would very much appreciate it if you could help us promote the Million Paws Walk by including something about the Million Paws Walk in the issue of National Dog that will be out late April/ early May.

You might also like to consider doing a longer news or feature article relating to the Million Paws Walk. For example, some possible story angles around the Million Paws Walk include the following:

- walking to fight obesity in pets and owners;
- getting fit with your pet;
- pets and owners in training in the lead up to the MPW;
- dedicated Million Paws Walkers who have been coming for many years;
- real life stories behind the animals rescued by the RSPCA;
- day in the life of an RSPCA inspector or volunteer;
- celebrities that support the RSPCA and the Million Paws Walk (including Suzie Wilks, Simone Jade McKinnon from McLeod's daughters, Craig Lowndes, The Living End, Peter Alexander); plus many more.

Please feel free to contact me on the details provided if you require anything further.

The RSPCA also has stacks of great photos that can be used- just a couple of examples are attached but there are plenty more where they came from.

NATALIE WINTER



Dog's in Today's Society

A seminar conducted by Dogs NSW on 14 March 2006 at NSW Parliament.

This was the first in a series of seminars to be conducted by the RNSWCC on the issue of children's safety with dogs and how best to interact with man's best friend. The half day was held in the Theatre at Parliament House in Macquarie Street. Attendance was by invitation and the audience comprised a good cross section of RNSWCC members from a variety of clubs and breeds. During the course of the morning, various MPs came and went but Parliament was sitting so it wasn't possible for MPs to attend the entire morning. The Rev Fred Nile did spend a good part of the morning listening to the speakers and chatting to attendees in the breaks.

The seminar was opened by Bob Curtis OAM followed by a welcome from RNSWCC Chairman, Keith Irwin. Keith explained that the seminar is designed to assist the State Government with a public education programme on child safety with dogs.

The first speaker was Channel 10 news presenter Tim Webster who set out his credentials, firstly as a committed dog owner and a breeder of 2 litters of German Shepherds and secondly as the person sitting in for John Laws over the Christmas holidays when the young girl was mauled by a dog on the south coast. He emphasised that the owners are the problem not the dogs and that we must be the leaders of the pack and train our dogs to interact with people properly. It is also our responsibility as owners to keep our dogs in our yards, particularly when we are not there, and to always have them under control. He accepted that the media may sensationalise dog attacks when they happen but said that the 2 things he received most calls from the public about during his radio days were the roads and dogs. So, it is a real public concern.

Tim was followed by a guest appearance from Wags the Dog, a character from Australia's internationally successful television program, the Wiggles. The children in attendance then left the theatre to send some time playing safely with Wags.

Well known veterinarian, author and TV and radio presenter, Dr Robert Zammit then talked about Kids Safety. He reminded the audience that dog attacks are the 4th most common reason for hospitalisation of children; after accidents in cars, on bicycles or in the school playground. Between 3 and 6 people each day are treated for injuries received from dogs, the majority being children under 12 or the elderly. 70% of these incidents occur in the family home with the family dog or a dog well known to the family. Dogs, on the other hand, are greatly beneficial to humans and to society and are well known to have positive health effects like lowering blood pressure, increasing cardiovascular fitness and lengthening life. For children, the care of an

animal teaches responsibility and the need to think about others. But it is essential to choose the right breed for the particular family and that family's lifestyle. When you choose a dog, you should, at least, meet the parents. That is the best indicator of what you are buying. And training is all important for every breed of dog but especially for their owners throughout the dog's life. It shouldn't stop at puppy school. Owners must never encourage their dog to do anything or behave in any way which could constitute a threat to any human, child or adult. And owners must never, ever leave a child unattended in the company of any dog. In response to a question from Professor Bob Hales, Dr Zammit agreed that the general public expectation that dogs will behave and think like humans has greatly contributed to the modern day misunderstanding of the dog and its proper role in family life.

Another well known veterinarian followed. Dr Kersti Seksel is an animal behaviourist and the incoming President of the NSW branch of the AVA. She is also President of the Australian Companion Animal Council, an organisation that advises governments of companion animal issues. She pointed out 66% of Australian households own pets. We are, in fact, the greatest pet owners per capita in the world. 60% of those households have their pet in their bed or their bedroom with them. It is an integral part of the family's life. Supervision of the dog and the children is essential. A Danish survey has shown that in every case of a dog attack upon a child during the period of the survey there was no parent present at the time. Education of parents and children is the key. The AVA has developed a Pet People Education Program, conducted in primary schools. It aims to teach children how to behave and live safely with animals and help them understand how animals behave and what an animal's behaviour is telling them.

The Minister for Local Government, the Honourable Kerry Hickey MP, then addressed the seminar. The Minister is responsible for the Companions Animals Act. He described himself as the owner of a Basset Hound named Barton and an ex-milkman who had had more than his fair share of run-ins with "unhappy" dogs. He also indicated that the Shadow Minister, the Honourable John Turner MP was present. He said that the importance of this seminar and those that followed was to assist dogs and the community to get along with each other and that it was the responsibility of every individual dog owner to ensure that his or her dog did get along with the community in which it lives. He emphasised the changes that have taken place in society so that dogs are no longer free to roam about the streets and people have less time to spend with their animals. He does not want to see dogs tied up, mistreated or uncared for. He is happy that the introduction of microchipping has resulted in more dogs being reunited with their families and less euthanasia. He agreed that the dog stories "out there" tend to be the negative ones and encouraged anyone with a

good dog story to pass it on to his parliamentary secretary, Michael Galderisi on 9228 3333, so that they can try to tip the media balance the other way. He also invited the audience to contact Michael on any matter related to dogs. He said the important thing is public education and that seminars like this and the AVA program were part of that education. The Minister was pressed by members of the audience to take steps to control the sale of dogs through pet shops but he responded strongly that it would never happen.

After the morning tea break, the new Public Relations Officer of the RNSWCC, Lauren Sykes, came to the podium. She took this opportunity to explain that Dogs NSW, the new business name of the RNSWCC, is designed to make it easier for people to find the RNSWCC when they are searching for a family companion and to help them to understand what RNSWCC members have to offer to the potential puppy buyer. The new name will be launched in July together with a new logo and new website and possibly a new name for the Canine Journal. She agreed that the RNSWCC has a large role to play in educating dog owners by directing the public to its extensive network of affiliated training and obedience clubs.

Lauren was followed by the last and probably best speaker for the day, the Honourable Ian Armstrong OBE MP, member for Lachlan and former Minister for Agriculture. As the owner of a Blue Heeler called Yabbie, he confessed to understanding personally the real value of dogs to all classes and ages in society. He said that archaeological digs had proven that dogs have had an association with humans for more than 4 million years. Their benefits to society are numerous. The companionship of animals provides comfort and relief from the difficulties of human relationships and helps to breakdown barriers between people. Dog assisted therapy ranges from seeing and hearing dogs to remedial reading, allergy treatment, improvement of self esteem, seizure detection and assistance with disabilities. A sniffer dog can identify 20 different banned substances and a search and rescue dog can free up 50 humans who are more often than not volunteers. He is certain that the need and demand for dogs in society will continue to grow and will not decrease so it is essential that we all live happily and safely together.

Ian related 2 of his favourite dog stories. The first comes from an autobiography written by the Australian equestrian Kevin Bacon. Kevin owned a dog called Jack who helped Kevin handle the horses. Once on a trip to north Qld, Jack disappeared. Despite all Kevin's efforts to find him, he remained lost when Kevin had to travel back south. A few weeks later, Jack was found in a very sorry state at the railway yards in Brisbane. It is believed that he travelled the thousands of miles south by following the railway tracks as many railway workers reported seeing him or a dog like him. He didn't survive his long trek and is now buried at the Ekka behind the horse stables. The second story concerns Dusty, a red

Kelpie. The dog was the constant companion of Ian's father. He went everywhere with him and slept under his office at the family farm. When his owner passed away, the dog went under the office. He wouldn't come out and no-one could get him out. He stayed there for 3 weeks until he, too, died. Ian used these stories to illustrate the incredible loyalty and bond that exists between a human and their dog, a bond which cannot be found anywhere else in life.

The seminar was closed by the Chairman of the ANKC, Hugh Gent OAM, who received an Order of Australia in the Australia Day Honours this year for his services to canine activities. Hugh said that the ANKC was giving consideration to also changing its name, perhaps to Dogs Australia. He is currently the Vice-Chairman of a companion animals working group which is part of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy. This is an initiative of the Australian Government designed to overcome its lack of legislative power in this area. He said initiatives like the seminar today assist governments to promote responsible dog ownership and society to understand exactly what that means. He thanked the RNSWCC and all the speakers for their involvement and looked forward to attending similar events in the future.

I enjoyed the seminar and learnt a few things about government initiatives in the area of child safety and public education. When the seminar is taken out into the wider public, I hope that it will provide more hard information on where people can go and who they can contact to get help and information on responsible dog ownership, training and safety. The audience at this seminar was already well informed and no-one would have had any doubt about the need for such programs. But the general public will need more than words to get them listening and doing what is needed.

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