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Fun Day Set For Dog Owners Of All Hearing Abilities

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Norwich - Laurie Meotti knows from experience that deaf people who own dogs might find it difficult to socialize in doggie settings and shy away from places like the Estelle Cohn Memorial Dog Park.

The Hebron resident and Labrador retriever rescue volunteer is trying to change that by organizing the Deaf Dog Owners' Fun Day Saturday from noon to 3 p.m. at the Norwich dog park on Asylum Street. The event is designed to be a get-together for deaf dog owners throughout the state.

"As a deaf owner of two rescued dogs and a foster parent for Labs4Rescue, I find myself a frequent dog park visitor," Meotti said in an e-mail she sent to Norwich dog park volunteer coordinator Mindy Wilson Angevine to arrange the event. "However, for a deaf person like me, there are communication barriers that prevent me from having the joy and experience of being able to socialize with other dog park visitors. Going to a dog park should be fun for both dogs and their humans, but, for me, it is often a very lonely experience."

Meotti said by e-mail Friday that the event is meant specifically for deaf owners, but as the park is open to the public, all are welcome to come, socialize and communicate with others about their dogs and their experiences as owners. An interpreter will be available. The rain date is Sunday.

"I'm not sure exactly how many are coming," Meotti said. "It could be a small number, or it could be large. The word has gotten out, so many within the deaf community are aware of this event."

If the event is a full house, Wilson said extra parking will be available along Alms House Lane that runs adjacent to the dog park. A walking trail from the side road leads to the park.

Wilson Angevine hopes regular dog park users will come to the event "and show your support for all users to enjoy our park to the fullest," she said.

Meotti said she's not really trying to raise awareness about the needs of deaf dog owners, only the need for all dog owners to be responsible and to socialize with their peers. She said she has been invited by the chairman of the Wethersfield Dog Park Committee to host the next event at that park.

Meotti owns two rescued Labs and serves as a foster home for dogs being prepared for adoption. She walks her dogs regularly, but said it's not the same as letting them run freely in a safe environment.

"Whenever I go to a dog park, I do my best to be friendly and social with everyone there," she said. "Most people are nice enough. Actually holding a conversation takes a great deal of effort. The May 3 event is a chance for deaf people to come together in a social setting with their friendly dogs for an afternoon of fun."

Meotti said dog parks are excellent for her work as a Lab rescue volunteer to help socialize foster dogs. The dogs she takes in are rescued and brought here from shelters down South.

She said the Labs are not being trained as service dogs, just as pets in need of new homes.

"Perhaps I could promote responsible dog ownership and maybe encourage a few of the deaf attendees to consider being a foster parent for dogs in need!" she said.