

The Seacoast going to (all kinds of) dogs

There are plenty of breeds and names to choose from

By Amy Kane

May 17, 2009 6:00 AM

Move over, Rover. Molly, Lucy and Max are the top dogs in the Seacoast — and they are more likely to be mutts, Labs or golden retrievers than any other breed.

A list compiled from current dog registrations in Portsmouth, Exeter and Hampton shows the 20 most popular names and breeds in the area.

Locals love Baileys, Buddys and Daisys. Pugs, poodles and boxers are plentiful. Spaniels and terriers romp in the parks. Maggies and Jakes meet at the beach.

The list merely scratches the surface, though. Dig a little deeper and find a treasure trove of names, and a variety of reasons people choose their canine companions.

But first, a look at No. 1: the colossally popular Labrador retriever.

Twelve percent to 13 percent of all dogs registered in each of the three communities this year are Labs. Water-loving Labs are suited to the Seacoast (they are also the number one breed in the country). Twice as many Labs are American Kennel Club registered as the next-most popular breed.

So what's so great about them?

Play ball

On a balmy May evening after work, Patrick Nicholas of Rye and his 3-year-old chocolate Lab Indy head down to Jenness Beach and repeat a time-honored tradition in the great outdoors: man and beast play fetch.

A sporting breed, Labrador retrievers are energetic, intelligent and willing to partner up and play the game. Nicholas said he did a lot of research before choosing a Lab to be his first dog.

He and his wife planned to start a family, so they wanted a dog that was friendly and good with kids. He was prepared to give his dog lots of fresh air, exercise and companionship. He was working from home when Indy was a puppy.

"I did training with him. I made a conscientious effort to be a good dog owner," said Nicholas.

Shortly after Indy arrived, Nicholas and his wife were expecting their first child; now number two is on the way.

"Getting a dog was the catalyst, I guess," he said.

Indy is named for movie adventurer Henry "Indiana" Jones, who in turn took his nickname from his pet dog.

Go, dog, go

Breeds with high activity levels are a good match for the adventurous. Pippi and Jeff McNally of Greenland, who are expecting their first child in August, like to go running along the beach and exploring in the mountains. They wanted a couple of dogs that could keep up.

Indy is an alert, athletic Australian shepherd. Rally is a golden mountain dog — a hybrid of a golden retriever and Bernese mountain dog. He has the playful good nature of a golden, and the mellow disposition and sturdy build of a Bernese.

Rally is a "purpose-built breed," according to Pippi McNally. Their previous dog, a golden retriever, died of cancer. They hoped a hybrid would have more resistance to the problems that can plague purebred dogs.

Where everybody knows your dog's name

Hybrid vigor was on display at the Portsmouth Dog Park at South Mill Pond in the late afternoon on Tuesday as pups and their people came out to play.

Tom Griffin of Portsmouth kept an eye on Luna, his 2-year-old shepherd mix. Luna was named for the full moon in the sky on the day of her adoption.

Brady, a cheerful 9-month-old husky-Lab mix, was a rescue from Arkansas. Owner Jessica Burrows of Dover said her boyfriend, who is a big Patriots fan, chose the name.

Mindy Triandafilou leaned against the fence while 4-year-old Oliver, a lanky Lab and Great Dane mix, romped with his cohorts. He was one of 11 puppies in his litter, adopted from Louisiana through the nonprofit [Labs4rescue](#).



A Labrador retriever and great Dane cross, 4-year-old Oliver is a big boy. Mindy Triandafilou of Portsmouth adopted him through a rescue agency.

"He came with that name, and I thought it was a good one," she said.

Gary Gansburg of Portsmouth said he brings his 5-year-old collie, Sadie, to the dog park for some quality time after work, and to let her socialize with other dogs.

"It socializes the people too," he said. "We love coming here."

Anthony Albine of Exeter adopted his 2-year-old black-and-white dog from the New Hampshire SPCA in Stratham. The mystery pup may be part Lab and part pointer. He didn't have a name for the first few weeks until a friend said, "He looks like a Hunter."

Dan Simmons of Newburyport said his Lab and pitbull mix, Lucy, is a sweetheart. His wife and two daughters chose the name, which he thinks is "kind of girly." Lucy is from the NHSPCA, too.

Jen Corbin, director of animal services, said most of the dogs arrive at the NHSPCA already named. Many come from other states, and sometimes their new owners will rename them based on their geographical origin, with names such as Dakota and Bama.

When staff members name a litter of puppies, they often choose a theme, sometimes associated with the closest holiday, said Corbin. One litter born near Presidents Day included a Jefferson, a Madison and a Washington.

"It makes them feel important," she said.

Odin, Sparky, Darwin and Cupcake

Zack Taylor of Kittery named his Newfoundland after the king of the Norse gods, Odin.

"I tried to think of a big name, something to fit him," said Taylor.

Famous for their size, strength and sweet nature, this breed has natural water rescue tendencies and webbed feet. Odin is 1½ years old and weighs 135 pounds. He will stop growing when he is 2, said Taylor.

Perusing the list of registered dogs reveals some interesting trends within municipalities.

In Portsmouth, mythology is big — with dog names of Apollo, Elektra, Athena, Thor, Zeus, Grendel and Hercules. Nautical names too: Splash, Rudder, Fathom, Tiller, Breezy, Fisher and River are popular.

Hampton likes spunky dog names: Sport, Rascal, Mischief, Courage, Sparky and Fang.

Exeter favors famous figures from history: Caesar, Charlemagne, D'Artagnan, Darwin, Dillinger, Toulouse, Satchmo, Cary Grant and Zorro.

Sometimes the size of a dog is evident just by its name, especially for the wee ones. Little Squirt, Little Bear, Love Muffin, Mr. Mini, Runtster, Munchkin, Tinkerbell, Bitsy, Shortcakes and Termite all live in the Seacoast.

The most popular dog names are people names, too. But deep in the dog registration lists are some odd characters with mysterious monikers: Mimi Bikini, Charlie Q-tip, Woo-Tang Jack, Dolly Lama, Ewok, Beetle Bomb, Mrs. Pickles and Sir Tonka.

In the food and drink categories, Portsmouth favors Pinot, Guinness, Truffle, Pumpkin, Popcorn, Raisin and Tostito. Hampton has Apple, Cheeto, Budweiser, Pepsi, Tequila, Cocoa and Cupcake.

Sweets and baked goods influence Exeter dog naming, with a registered Biscuit, Buckwheat, Bisquick, Cinnamon, Jelly Bean, Snickers, Licorice, Peaches, Kahlua and Chocolate Mousse.

One sweet pup trundling around the Portsmouth Dog Park was a 3-year-old basset hound named Arepa. Her owner, Sylvia Rodriguez, named her for a

popular Puerto Rican food, a sweet and savory cornbread pancake.

"Five of my parents' seven dogs in Puerto Rico are named after food," she said.

She and her beau, Federico Garcia, are busy graduate students and chose a low-energy breed that wouldn't need too much exercise and would be happy to sleep during the day while they were away.

"She's the perfect dog," said Rodriguez.

Little dogs are big, too

Dachshunds, pugs and Chihuahuas are the third, fourth and fifth most popular breeds locally. Shih tzus, bichon frises, beagles and terriers also rank high.

Ann Mikulich of Newfields owns a cairn terrier named Heather and a Norfolk terrier named Jimmy, because he was born on the front seat of a GMC Jimmy truck on the way to the veterinarian.

Heather and Jimmy have big personalities, said Mikulich.

"I picture them in motorcycle jackets. They may be little, but they're tough guys," she said.

In taking care of them, she likes their manageable size.

"I have been dragged down the street by a golden retriever I was walking on a leash, and I have the scars on my knees to prove it," she said.

Mikulich brings her terriers to North Beach in Hampton for morning dog walks with her friend Sue Gosselin of Newfields and Sam the beagle.

Sam, like most beagles, is good with kids, said Gosselin. He has a mild, though sometimes stubborn, temperament.

"He's usually on an even keel," she said. "I think people choose dogs that match their personalities."

When he was a puppy tripping over his long ears, the Gosselin family held a meeting to choose his name. "We decided he looked like a Sam."

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, more than 37 percent of U.S. households own at least one dog. Gosselin thinks she knows why.

"The thing about a dog is that it's unconditional," she said. "They're never unhappy to see you. Life is enriched by a dog. If you feel bad, you look at your dog and you feel better."

Rare and true

Finnegan, a rare Kerry blue terrier, has been a companion to Sue Carmell of Newmarket through hard times and good times.

When Carmell moved from Oregon back to the Seacoast to be with her dying mother, she saw an ad in the paper for Kerry blue terrier puppies. The sociable sheep-herding breed from Ireland appealed to Carmell, who has an Irish heritage, too.

Carmell took a cross-country road trip with Finnegan, but a more typical itinerary includes a stop at the dog park several times a week.

"She's a real comfort, and a friend," said Carmell.

Two-year-old Mercedes is one of a kind — in Hampton at least. She is the only presa canario registered in town. Her owner, Dan Briere of Hampton Beach, liked the way they look, so he sought a breeder and found one in Connecticut.

Mercedes has the muscular body and big square head characteristic of the mastiff-type breeds. Presas are working dogs from Spain, where they are used to herd and guard livestock.

Mercedes loves other dogs, said Briere, but her best friend is a rottweiler named Chevy. These cool canines meet in the morning to cruise Hampton Beach.