

DESERT DOG NEWS

Tucson's Pet Paper

Flyin' High

by Erin Burt

Inese Kalnins had just finished agility classes at Garvin's Dog Training when she first heard about flyball. The owner of two young and busy border collie littermates thought it sounded like something they would enjoy.

"Our dogs had their obedience training at Karyn Garvin and were currently taking agility classes there. When Maureen mentioned trying flyball, we thought, 'Sounds like fun!' Maureen has been an excellent trainer in both," said Inese.

Maureen Odenwald, training director for the sports division of Garvin's Dog Training, describes flyball as the perfect sport for dogs with lots of drive and a "love of the almighty tennis ball."

Maureen got hooked on flyball after trying to find something for her non-agility dog to do. She said, "My second dog favored the ball more, so I thought I would give him something to do. As it turned out, while I was teaching him, Lucy, my agility dog, was sitting on the sidelines watching, and when she could no longer take it, she ran over and shoved poor Bruiser out of the way, performing flyball perfectly with no instruction." Today Lucy is retired, but Maureen's Boston terrier, Willie, enjoys flyball — although not at the competitive level.

If you've never seen flyball in person, it's worth a look. Teams of four dogs begin a relay race at the first of four hurdles spaced 10 feet apart. After the last hurdle, the dog jumps on a spring-loaded box to eject a tennis ball that the dog must catch; then he runs back over the hurdles before the next dog on his team can take off. Generally two courses are laid out side-by-side so the dogs can see one another as they run.

The sport was invented in the 1970s, but didn't take off until it was featured on the *Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*. This led to the first tournament, in 1983. One big draw has always been that it's one of few sports in which mixed breeds can run beside their purebred pals.

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Photography by Erika Swingle www.vignettedphotography.com

"Knowledge is my favorite thing. While training helps you with one animal, knowledge helps you with all animals." said Elyssa Struse who participates in the 4-H dog project with Murphy.

Not Just Cows & Cooking

The 4-H Dog Project Teaches Life Skills to Youths

by Megan Durham

As rambunctious and energetic as they are, it's hard to believe that the two of them ever sit still. But as soon as 11-year-old Elyssa Struse clamps the lead onto Murphy's collar, everything changes. All of their previous energy is channeled into intense focus, and they stand quiet, straight and still.

This is a focus that doesn't necessarily come easily for either of them. Elyssa suffers from both severe ADD (attention deficit disorder) and CCD (cumulative cognitive deficit), while Murphy is filled with all of the hyperactive energy usually associated with Dalmatians. In fact, this hyperactivity may be the reason Murphy ended up with the Struse family in the first place.

He wandered onto the family's 120-acre farm last year, badly dehydrated and plagued by parasites. The Struses believe that like so many other dogs they have found, Murphy was abandoned in the desert along Park Link Drive, a few miles north of the county line in Pinal County. The area seems to attract the dumping of unwanted pets, perhaps because of its remote desert location.

Luckily, Murphy recovered, and Elyssa begged to keep him to use in the dog project her 4-H club was starting.

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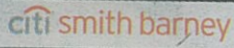
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Elyssa & Murphy at the Pima Country Fair

When most people think of 4-H, livestock projects tend to come to mind. But 4-H is much more than just "cows and cooking," said Curt Peters, a Pima County 4-H youth development associate agent.

"The typical misconception is that 4-H is basically livestock projects for rural kids," he said. "In reality, there are more children involved in 4-H that come from urban areas than rural, and livestock is just one of many projects kids can choose to take part in." 4-H has a wide variety of projects, including rocketry, robotics, photography and outdoor adventure, just to name a few.

One advantage of projects such as the dog project is that they enhance long-term educational effects. Partnerships often last for several years as the child and his or her dog progress through classes that require them to perform in increasingly difficult classes. And compared to the skills involved in raising livestock, the skills learned in the dog project may be more likely to be used later in life.

The slogan of "learning by doing" is what makes 4-H programs unique. Using certified volunteers to guide the process, many 4-H groups use cross-age learning to help participants attain life skills. This means that the groups are not necessarily segregated by age, which allows older youths to teach younger ones and be a part of the leadership process. It is a technique that works well for Elyssa.

"[It's] the way most kids learn best," said her mother, Elaine. "But special learners such as Elyssa really benefit from this approach to learning."

No one who has watched Elyssa work with Murphy could disagree. Despite not being able to start training until January, nearly four months after most participants had started working, the two of them eagerly joined the project.

One of the major draws of the dog project is the chance to train with the dog and to learn the four different disciplines on which competition participants are judged: obedience, showmanship, agility and rally. Each of these disciplines is judged based on the skill of the dog and the participant, not on the appearance of the dog, as is the case in traditional dog shows. Obedience, agility and rally depend on the dog's ability to perform a prescribed group of exercises, while showmanship is based on the participant's ability to show the dog in its best light.

In 4-H projects, knowledge is as important as training. Participants are required to learn a great deal about their subjects. And in the dog project, this means they start with learning about the basics of dog care, for example, vaccinations, food and grooming. Then they move on to knowledge about dogs in general, including breeds, diseases and traits.

Elyssa doesn't mind the knowledge requirement. In fact, she said, "Knowledge is my favorite thing. While training helps you with one animal, knowledge helps you with all animals." In thinking about her response, she

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