

REPORT ON THE PHILADLPHIA PET EXPO

By Pam Sleeper and Sidney Hoblit

The ILWC was pleased to participate in the Philadelphia Pet Expo January 13th-15th, with a booth at the event showcasing our Longhaired Whippets. Our dogs also participated in an agility demo Friday evening and put on a demonstration of Nosework and Wag It Games in the main arena on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

The event was a resounding success for us, with tons of interest in our dogs. Our booth was absolutely one of the busiest at the entire event (and it was a BIG event!), and preliminary results show our website has had a big jump in 'hits' in the days during and since the expo!

THE PEOPLE

WOW!!! What a crowd! Don't have the final tally (the pet expo people said they would let us know the attendance numbers once they calculated both the advance and at-the-door sales,) but they confirmed there were more than 16,000 people who attended!!!!

I swear, 15,900 of them stopped at our booth at least once to pet the dogs! Several -- and I mean maybe 100 -- people kept coming back. Some told us, "I'm back ... again. I just love these dogs!" Others returned with friends noting these were the dogs they were telling them about.

The visit that left the biggest impression on me was by one little girl who came with her mother and a friend on Saturday, then came back with her mom and a different friend on Sunday. She told her mother on Sunday that the only thing she wanted to see were the LHWs! She just couldn't get enough of them.

I spoke with the mom a bit when the girls--at mom's urging--went to watch one of the performances offered throughout the day. She wanted to talk to me about some anxiety issues her daughter has and said she is very seriously considering one of our calm, gentle dogs for her. We discussed the possibility of the dog becoming a service/social dog so it could go everywhere with her. Mom was very taken with the breed and excited about the potential help one of them could be for her little girl.

THE DOGS

They were all truly unbelievable!!!! They were so outgoing and friendly. Several of our dogs had never been to anything with a real crowd before and to bring them in to this expo with the wall-to-wall people (many with their own dogs) and the incredible noise and activity level in the building would have sent lesser dogs into spasms within a short time. But they acted like they had done this for years, edging each other out of place so they could get petted by the many people who stopped to adore them. (Gwena, Sophia's adorable pit bull "sister", was in heaven with all the petting, while people got a real kick out of our telling them she was a "Longhair wanna be".) Even the few of our dogs that were initially shy or we had expected to be shy spent most of their time hanging out 'front and center', and really seemed to get 'into' all the attention and petting, actually more and more so as time went on!

Every single one was a real trooper, continuously showing how wonderful they are and doing the breed proud. Even after having been there 4 to 8 hours a day, they kept greeting people and welcoming being petted like they hadn't been touched all week. They remained calm and responsive to anything we asked of them, from coming up to greet children, to jumping on and off the table as needed. They were perfect! We couldn't have asked for more from them.

THE VOLUNTEERS

It was wonderful that we had so many volunteers and dogs come, because by Sunday afternoon/evening, some of those who had been there the longest were getting pretty tired. With all the help the dogs could just go to the back of the booth area and lie down while the people could sit down and relax, or they could go out for long walks, or leave and get away from everything for awhile and there were still plenty of pups to pet and people with whom to speak at the booth.

Huge thanks and great appreciation to all our volunteers! Pat, Ellie, Mark, Sidney, Jean, and especially Pam who was our contact person and had everything so incredibly organized, anticipating anything we possibly could have wanted or needed. Between setting up Friday morning, attending the booth at the expo Friday afternoon and evening and all day Saturday and Sunday, then packing and loading everything up Sunday night, it was a very long, very busy, very exhausting, but totally rewarding weekend! And special kudos to Pam and Jean, who each made an 8+ hour drive to participate.

Any thanks, of course, to all our absolutely incredible dogs – Gambler, Cassi, Sophia, Gwena, Lucy, Chase, KD, Vest, Molly, Bea, Crystal, Dashiell, Teddy, Milo, and Tanner, all of whom worked as hard as the people.

This event could not have happened without **ALL** of you, let alone be the major success you made it! THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, ALL!

WHAT WE LEARNED

The dogs taught us a new way to show them off! They started jumping up on the table so people could see and get to them better. (There just wasn't enough room for all of them at the gate.) And they realized it was more fun to greet people at face level. Milo would NOT get off the table, and kept kissing everyone who stopped to visit. (It was suggested we put up a sign that said 'Kissing Booth' for him next time!) So Ellie purchased a foam pad/bed and donated it to the cause (thank you Ellie), and we ended up with several dogs just lying on the table drinking in the attention as fast as they could. The dogs would just lie there and people would come over and pet them and talk to us about them. Often the crowd was several people deep, with everyone leaning forward to touch the dogs and hear all about them.

What really impressed them was how the dogs didn't try to jump off the table or get to other dogs. They were also amazed and commented on how agile and gentle they were in jumping up onto the table. When the dogs would lean over the table to sniff the other dogs who came up to them without trying to get off the table, people were really impressed. Some visitors who were carrying small dogs were amazed at how their dogs would touch noses with ours, noting that their dogs were usually afraid of other dogs or would snap at them.

Having the dogs up on the table was such a success that we have decided to dedicate an entire table to dogs on beds at future events. 😊

Once again, our dogs proved over and over what a sweet, easy going, gentle breed they are. The fact that we were right across the aisle from (Jack/Parsons) Russell Rescue also helped to highlight how calm and serene our breed is. (-: The demos also attracted a lot of attention, and brought more people to our booth. Numerous visitors who stopped by would tell us "I saw the dogs at the demo, and had to come meet them up close and personal".

All in all, we had a blast (what is more fun than talking about your dogs for hours on end!), met some nice people, and the dogs loved being the center of attention. Hopefully we will have as many or more volunteers in the future, so we can continue to participate in similar large events!