



AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB



# IN SESSION

## AKC'S CONGRESSIONAL NEWSLETTER

The American Kennel Club's Newsletter for Members of Congress and their Staff

### PERSPECTIVES

#### 125 Years of Responsible Dog Ownership and Expanding ...

2009 has been a banner year for the American Kennel Club. This year we celebrated the 125th anniversary of our founding –and we welcomed our first mixed breeds to the world of AKC.

Scientific studies increasingly demonstrate the benefits of dog ownership and interaction for both individuals and society – including children's programs such as the AKC's *Safety Around Dogs*, *Best Friends* and *Canine Good Citizen*® programs, military and police working dog programs, programs for the elderly/disabled, prison dog training programs, the establishment of healthy exercise habits, and much more.

The AKC honors all the ways that dogs improve our lives and we are proud to be the voice for responsible dog owners and breeders.

If there were one word to describe the AKC, it would be *Responsibility*. In the issue analysis on page 4, we explore the concept of responsibility in dog breeding. We look at recent canine legislation, what makes for a responsible breeder, and the important role responsible breeders play in society. Responsible breeders do more than breed the nation's family pets and top-ranked

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### Congressional Canine Spotlight – Congressman Robert Wittman & his Yellow Labs

*In each issue of In Session, AKC will profile a dog-loving member of the Capitol community. This issue features Congressman Robert Wittman(R-VA)*



Congressman Wittman with his Yellow Labrador Retrievers (From L to R: Holly, Nicky, Katy, and Jody.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CONGRESSMAN ROBERT WITTMAN

Dogs have always been an integral part Congressman Rob Wittman's life.

"I have a lot of fond memories of hunting and training dogs with my Dad," Wittman recalled of his childhood spent in part raising

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### AKC Sporting Breeds Hunt With Wounded Warriors



PHOTO COURTESY AKC PERFORMANCE EVENTS

Members of the Wounded Warrior Battalion from Fort Campbell, KY enjoyed two beautiful days of quail hunting at Cedar Grove Plantation near Clarksville, VA. Mr. James Kinnear, owner of Cedar Grove, readily accepted the opportunity to host the Wounded Warriors. There was no shortage of dog power, with five Vizslas, one German Wirehaired Pointer and six Boykin Spaniels taking turns leading the hunt. Many of these dogs had earned titles, ranging from Junior Hunter to Dual Champion, in AKC field events. The local field trial community raised over \$1,000 to defer the Wounded Warriors travel expenses.

The pointing breeds and spaniels worked in tandem with two pointing

breeds locating and pointing the quail and then the Boykins were sent in to flush and retrieve. Doug Ljungren, AVP of Performance Events was one of the pointing breed dog handlers. "I had never hunted in this manner before but it worked well. The Boykins are a delightful little dog. They really know their business."

With the pointing dog handlers working out front, the Wounded Warriors were transported on a wagon drawn by two mules. Sunday night the hunting party was treated to a Cedar Grove dinner specialty – quail potpie. The Wounded Warriors appreciation was obvious. It was a unique weekend that will be remembered by all.

Reprinted with permission from AKC Performance Events.

(Continued from page 1)

performance, working and assistance dogs. They also serve as a resource for expertise when communities face animal-related issues. Nearly 5,000 AKC clubs and federations throughout the United States provide educational resources for their communities, and every AKC national breed club has a rescue arm that is actively involved in re-homing ALL dogs in need—regardless of whether they have AKC papers.

For years, AKC has accorded responsible purebred dog owners the benefits of participating in AKC family activities such as agility, obedience and hunt trials. Now, AKC's new mixed-breed registry, Canine Partners, extends these and additional benefits to owners of mixed-breed dogs as well (For more information on this new program, see page 3).

Thank you for sharing our passion for responsible dog ownership. Please consider us your resource for any dog-related questions you may have this year or in the session ahead.

All the best,

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**AKC MISSION STATEMENT**

The AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB is dedicated to upholding the integrity of its Registry, promoting the sport of purebred dogs and breeding for type and function. Founded in 1884, the AKC and its affiliated organizations advocate for the purebred dog as a family companion, advance canine health and well-being, work to protect the rights of all dog owners and promote responsible dog ownership.

Continued from page 1, "Congressman Robert Wittman"

English Setters and Pointers for quail hunting. "Not only were they hunting dogs, but they were pets, which I think is a great combination."

Wittman's love of dogs continues today, and the Congressman spends time whenever he can hunting with and "enjoying [the] company" of his four AKC-registered Labrador Retrievers



Congressman Wittman hunting with "Holly"

PHOTO COURTESY OFFICE OF CONGRESSMAN ROBERT WITTMAN

"Holly", "Katy", "Nicky", and "Jody", as well as "Grant", a hound dog his daughter rescued from the side of the road when she was a child.

"Our dogs are very much...a part of our family," he stated. "We're out with the dogs hunting or just playing throughout the day."

Wittman and his family have been raising Labrador Retrievers for seven years at his home in Virginia's First Congressional District – a responsibility he believes requires both education and responsibility.

"I think that organizations like AKC are the way to go when educating breeders and ensuring folks are responsible with both the breed and the dogs themselves. Breeders have a responsibility to improve the breed and ensure we're breeding those dogs that have the best traits and great characteristics."

Labrador Retrievers are well-known for their friendly, outgoing personalities – a trait that can sometimes get them into trouble, as the Wittman family has found. "We are fairly early risers...One morning our oldest dog Holly went to 'visit' the Chocolate Lab that lives two

doors down from us; however, [that] dog's family [doesn't get up] as early as us," the Congressman shared.

"Well, Holly found her way to the dog door...made it into their home, and jumped on their bed! Not only does [our neighbor's dog] not do that, but they must have been pretty surprised to be awoken by a *non-Chocolate Lab!* As you can imagine, we had a bit of apologizing to do."

Wittman takes great pride in his dogs and recognizes the big responsibility that comes with being a dog owner. "[It's] a reciprocal relationship of love and care," he explained. "These dogs depend on us for food and shelter, and [we] on them for their companionship."

The Congressman is deeply concerned that there are people who actively

abuse animals – a situation he calls "intolerable". He lamented that many in the general public were not aware of the impact of these people until 2007, when the story broke about NFL quarterback Michael Vick's involvement in a dog-fighting ring. Horrific acts such as dog fighting "suggest a deeper problem in these folks that we have to combat," he says.

Congressman Wittman's love of dogs is also evident at his Capitol Hill office, where he creates a dog-friendly atmosphere. "I've brought each of my dogs to work through my time in Congress," he explained. "Many of my staff members have dogs themselves, so they and everyone else we meet love having them around."

He also admitted that having his dogs at work is personally beneficial. "It's comforting just to have my dogs with me."

"And," he added, "with all of their shedding it's a good measure of whether or not the carpets have been vacuumed recently!"

# Clubs Promote Responsible Dog Ownership in Local Communities

Over 500 AKC dog clubs from around the country commemorated the American Kennel Club's Responsible Dog Ownership Day in September by hosting fun, family-oriented events in their local communities.

These events, hosted by local kennel clubs from Daytona to Pittsburgh to Las Vegas (just to name a few), were as varied as the breeds of dogs represented, but all focused on the importance of responsible dog ownership and care.

Many of these events included microchip clinics, obedience and agility demonstrations, and AKC Canine Good Citizen® tests (where dogs are rewarded based on their ability to complete a 10-step test that highlights proper training and socialization).

Some clubs partnered with local shelters and rescues to raise awareness for animal control concerns in the community and to teach visitors how they can be part of the solution. This included the Bull Terrier Club of Dallas, who used their event in conjunction with Plano (Texas) Animal Control to emphasize the need for Bull Terrier rescue in their region and to educate attendees about the unique qualities of this breed.

A number other clubs educated their



Young Child Meets a Neapolitan Mastiff at a Local Responsible Dog Ownership Day Event

MARY BLOOM, COURTESY OF AKC

communities about specific dog breeds, allowing people to interact with different dogs and watching them perform in various demonstrations. This included the Oregon State Bulldog Club (Portland, OR), who provided information on their breed to new and long-time owners and promoted themselves as the primary resource for correct Bulldog education and facts for their community. The German Shepherd Dog Club of Southern New Hampshire held herding trials to show spectators exactly what the dogs were originally bred to do (for more infor-

mation on AKC herding and Performance Events, see article page 7).

The AKC held its own Responsible Dog Ownership Day in Raleigh, NC, in which over 30 local clubs participated in a "meet the breeds" event. Over 2,000 visitors got the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of dog breeds and talk with their breeders and owners.

The AKC's event also included numerous other community-oriented activities including discounted microchipping, Canine Good Citizen® testing, and a raffle to raise money for the AKC Companion Animal Recovery's Canine Disaster Relief Fund. A local fire department joined the AKC to promote pet fire safety.

Responsible Dog Ownership Days are held each September in communities across the country. If you are interested in finding one in your area, contact the AKC Government Relations Department at (919) 816-3720 or [doglaw@akc.org](mailto:doglaw@akc.org).

## AKC Welcomes Mixed Breed Dogs



For 125 years, the American Kennel Club's name has been synonymous with purebred dogs. In October 2009, the AKC took a historic step when it announced a major new initiative called AKC Canine Partners, which welcomes

mixed-breed owners into the AKC community and strengthens the AKC's commitment to being the champion of all dogs and responsible dog owners.

AKC Canine Partners is an opportunity for mixed-breed dog owners to join the AKC's community of dog lovers. Although these dogs will not be a part of AKC's traditional purebred registry, their owners will receive special certification, as well as a lifetime enrollment in the AKC's Companion Animal Recovery service, which reunites lost pets with their owners.

Once enrolled, owners of all ages will have the opportunity to participate in stand-alone Agility, Obedience, and Rally competitions, which are fun-filled

ways to enjoy dogs and interact with other dog owners.

All dogs in this program must be spayed or neutered, in keeping with the AKC's promotion of responsible dog ownership. The AKC encourages dog owners to spay and neuter their pets unless they intend to breed them or show them in our conformation events.

Canine Partners encourages proper training, responsible dog ownership, and pet owner education, while also allowing all dogs and their owners to benefit from the numerous services the AKC provides.

For more information on AKC Canine Partners, visit [AKC.org](http://AKC.org) and click on "Mixed Breeds" in the top menu.



# Issue Analysis: The Value of Responsible Dog Breeders

There are two issues on which all dog lovers agree. First, dogs deserve a life in a safe, caring, and healthy environment. Second, those who treat dogs in a negligent or cruel manner should be held accountable.

The American Kennel Club (AKC) takes a strong line on animal cruelty, including implementing a policy that suspends AKC privileges for anyone convicted of animal cruelty involving dogs. The AKC is also the only registry that has a significant Investigations and Inspections program to ensure that people who register litters with the AKC raise their dogs in a humane manner.

The AKC plays an active role in the debate surrounding breeders, and works to ensure that those who treat dogs irresponsibly or inhumanely are held responsible for their actions, while ensuring that the rights of responsible owners and breeders are protected.

## What is a Responsible Breeder?

One of the most effective ways to ensure that dogs are placed in safe, loving environments is to support responsible dog breeders. Local communities should consider responsible breeders an asset, as they are in a unique position to mentor new dog owners and provide advice and detailed information about the dogs they own and sell.

Responsible breeders are experts in their breed, and know the pedigree of the dogs they sell. They can tell potential buyers about the temperament, health, and other characteristics unique to the



Bearded Collies celebrating the holidays at their breeders' Michigan home. All the dogs owned by this kennel are taught basic manners from an early age. Their breeder is an AKC Canine Good Citizen® Evaluator.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARYANN AND JACK SZALKA, AFTER DARK BEARDED COLLIES. USED WITH PERMISSION.

puppy they are considering. Many breeders devote their entire lives to developing a line or pedigree of dogs that meet specific temperament, performance, and health standards. Many also breed dogs for specific purposes, such as hunting,

**“One of the most effective ways to ensure dogs are placed in safe, loving environments is to support responsible breeders”**

search and rescue, therapy, and assistance for the disabled.

When responsible breeders sell a puppy, they ensure these dogs are placed in good homes by implementing a screening process for potential buyers and following up after the purchase. Breeders often take dogs back if they are not in an ideal situation and place them in new homes, as in the case of “Bo”, the First Family’s Portuguese Water Dog. All of the AKC national breed parent clubs have rescue programs for their breeds. Parent club rescues are often comprised of AKC breeder volunteers who work with local animal control officers or individual own-

ers to ensure dogs are not abandoned in shelters, but rather placed in safe, loving environments.

Being a responsible dog breeder is truly a labor of love that comes with a significant price tag. Few if any responsible breeders get wealthy raising dogs, as the money made from puppy sales goes into kennel improvements and basic dog care. Responsible dog breeders breed because they love their chosen breed(s) and are willing to dedicate their lives and resources to raising quality dogs.

## More than a Numbers Game

Every profession from accountants and lawyers to doctors and teachers has a few “bad apples” that tarnish the reputation of an otherwise respectable profession. Unfortunately dog breeding is no exception.

Thankfully, these few irresponsible breeders comprise a very small minority of an otherwise unique and special profession. Those who do breed or care for dogs in an irresponsible or cruel

manner must be punished under the law, but the term “irresponsible” must be carefully defined.

An unfortunate but common trend is to equate the term “irresponsible” with the number of dogs – particularly females – someone owns. There is an unfortunate tendency among individuals unfamiliar with animal husbandry and best practices in animal care to assume that keeping large numbers of dogs automatically equates to poor and inhumane care. The number of animals owned has never correlated with the level of care.

Many agriculture groups have part-

nered with the AKC throughout the United States to fight legislation that places an arbitrary cap on animal ownership. They know that historically as well as today, the great kennels—like the great horse farms or cattle ranches—have maintained and provided excellent care to large numbers of animals.

Just as there are excellent owners of 100 dogs, there are negligent owners of one dog. Simply reducing the number of animals a person or business may own will not automatically make them a better or more humane owner. There is no magic number that will suddenly make someone a better dog owner or breeder. Arbitrary numerical caps completely miss the underlying issue—owner responsibility.

Animal ownership limits can actually create more problems for dogs and the community at large. Limits can force caring, responsible owners to relinquish dogs to a local shelter simply to comply with an arbitrary ownership cap. These dogs are then housed or euthanized at great expense to local taxpayers.

Recent stories from England cite concerns with animal inbreeding. Legislation introduced in a number of states in 2009 also addressed this issue. Ownership limits can actually perpetuate this problem. In fact, one of the best ways to avoid inbreeding in pure-bred dogs is to ensure that breeders have the ability to own enough dogs so they can make the best possible breeding decisions for the health and well-being of their breed and their pedigrees.

#### **A Matter of Enforcement**

There is no question that those who treat dogs in an inhumane manner should be punished. Each of the 50 states, as well as the United States Code, outlaw animal negligence and cruelty. When tragic stories of animal cruelty and irresponsible breeding come to light, they almost always result in charges under existing law being brought against the individual or business responsible.

The problem is not an absence of laws, but rather a lack of enforcement or the resources to properly enforce existing

laws. Many states and local communities simply do not have the manpower or money necessary to adequately enforce existing laws.

There have been many attempts across the country in 2009 to further regulate dog breeders, including requiring warrantless inspections of private homes without probable cause as well as impractical and arbitrary standards of care. Not only do such provisions violate the rights of responsible, law-abiding citizens, they are also ineffective and unenforceable. The problem is more complex than simply creating new laws – it requires the ability and will to enforce the laws against negligence and cruelty that are already on the books. A “quick fix” of



## **“Ownership limits are arbitrary and do not address the underlying issue of owner responsibility.”**

adding new laws will not change or improve a lack of enforcement and may only divert resources from much-needed enforcement operations.

At the federal level, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has regularly strengthened the standards for humane care and treatment of dogs and other animals owned by those regulated by the Animal Welfare Act. The AKC supports the strong enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, as well as an increase in the number of USDA enforcement personnel.

#### **An Effective Solution**

Breeder and owner responsibility cannot be defined by establishing arbitrary

ownership limits or unenforceable breeding requirements. Instead, responsibility should be defined by the quality of care given to the animals. This is why the American Kennel Club works with dog owners, breeders, and community leaders throughout the country to educate the public about responsible dog ownership (See p. 3 for an article on our annual nationwide Responsible Dog Ownership Day events). The AKC also encourages responsible breeding practices by supporting educational symposia for breeders and competitive dog shows and other events where top breeders showcase and compete with the best of their breeding programs. The AKC Canine Health Foundation has allocated over \$22 million

to research studies focusing on helping dogs live longer, healthier lives.

Where legislative fixes are needed, the AKC is pleased to assist in bringing community leaders and responsible breeders together to create positive, effective solutions. For example, the Indiana General Assembly introduced legislation in 2009 that limited animal ownership, included many arbitrary care and condition policies, and allowed for warrantless inspections of private homes and property. The AKC worked with responsible Hoosier dog owners, breeders, and key legislators to identify the real issues.

Together, this group succeeded in closing the loopholes in Indiana’s animal cruelty statutes and creating a bill that solely addressed the issues of irresponsible dog breeding in their state.

For over 125 years, the AKC has been dedicated to well-being of dogs. We support and value the responsible owners and breeders who breed and raise our cherished pets and beloved working dogs. Responsible breeders are an important asset and educational resource in our communities. Through educational programs and enforcement of existing laws, we can punish those who harm animals while recognizing that responsible breeders who devote their lives to their dogs are part of the solution, not the problem.



AMERICAN  
KENNEL CLUB<sup>SM</sup>

## RESPONSIBLE BREEDING PRACTICES

### BACKGROUND:

Dog owners bear a special responsibility to their canine companions to provide proper care and humane treatment at all times. The American Kennel Club (AKC) and its member clubs understand the challenges in creating effective animal control ordinances for a community. That is why we support laws that target irresponsible dog owners and deplorable animal care. These are the issues that need to be addressed in any law seeking to stop “puppy mills”. Regulations such as limit laws and stringent engineering requirements, however, are ineffective, difficult to enforce, and unfair to responsible dog owners. Government officials should instead focus on reasonable, enforceable legislation to crack down on irresponsible owners without punishing responsible breeders.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER:

- **AKC SUPPORTS ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS AND STANDARDS OF CARE**

The heartbreaking stories and pictures of mistreated dogs are not the result of an individual owning too many dogs. They are the result of irresponsible owners who are unable and/or unwilling to properly care for their animals. The AKC strongly opposes the breeding of dogs by those who do so without regard for the dogs’ welfare. We support scrupulous enforcement of the federal Animal Welfare Act and state and local regulations governing the humane care of animals.

- **LIMITING DOG OWNERSHIP WILL NOT PROTECT DOGS**

Irresponsible owners exist regardless of how many dogs they own. There are irresponsible owners of 20 dogs and irresponsible owners of one dog. Selecting an arbitrary limit will not prevent these people from being bad owners. A limit on the number of dogs an individual can own would restrict the many responsible breeders who raise and breed purebred dogs. These breeders make a serious commitment to their animals and to ensuring the future health, welfare and breed type of their individual breeds. They work to carefully screen potential owners to make sure the dogs will be placed in a safe, caring environment. In addition, many proposed laws that target “puppy mills” impact the many responsible fanciers and dog owners who also rescue unwanted animals and either personally adopt them as pets or find them permanent homes.

- **LAWS SHOULD IMPLEMENT REASONABLE, ENFORCEABLE STANDARDS**

Any bill that seeks to improve the quality of life and care of dogs must focus on responsible ownership and strict enforcement of neglect and cruelty laws. Laws should be passed and enforced that establish reasonable standards of care. These laws should not, however, impose rigorous engineering and other requirements on breeders that are difficult to follow and enforce.

- **LAWS SHOULD NOT CREATE MORE BURDENS ON A COMMUNITY**

Limit laws are very costly and burdensome to enforce. If someone owns more than their allotted number of dogs, they will then be required to dispose of those over the limit. These dogs will end up housed in shelters and/or euthanized at the community/taxpayer’s expense. In addition, implementing a bill with stringent engineering and other standards is difficult to enforce and results in an enormous strain on animal control officials.

# AKC Holds Record 4,000 Performance Events in 2009

The human-canine bond predates history. For centuries man has owned dogs that have assisted with a number of important tasks such as hunting, herding and guarding livestock, transportation and catching vermin. In 2009, the American Kennel Club (AKC) sanctioned over 4,000 Performance Events, which celebrate the amazing and varied abilities of individual breeds of dogs.

Unlike conformation “dog show” events such as the Eukanuba National Championship or the Westminster Kennel Club dog show, which evaluate how a dog’s structure conforms to breed standards, performance events celebrate and evaluate a dog’s ability to actually perform the specific functions for which its breed was originally developed.

There are currently 15 different performance events sanctioned by the AKC, each of which is unique and focuses on the qualities and abilities of individual breeds. The AKC and its breed clubs specially tailor each event to highlight the individual skills of different breeds or groups. These include breed-specific Herding, Hunting, and Earthdog (chasing game to ground and holding it) competitions, as



German Shorthaired Pointer competing in a Pointer Breed Field Trial

**“Each competition recognizes the work of generations of responsible breeders to hone the inherent abilities that make their breed unique.”**

well as a variety of field trials specific to groups such as Pointers, Coonhounds, and Retrievers.

Some of the first recorded field trials took place in England during the 1860’s, during which gentlemen would compete with their dogs in events such as tracking, flushing and retrieving game. After the Civil War, field trials caught on in the United States (the first one was hosted by the Tennessee Sportsmen’s Association in 1874). The first AKC-sanctioned field trials were held in the 1920’s and have increased in popularity ever since. Last year (2008) alone saw over 255,500 entries for 3,900 AKC-licensed performance events across the United States.

Performance Events are *generational*. Each competition recognizes the culmination of work of generations of responsible breeders to hone the inherent abilities (such as retrieving, pointing, herding, etc.) that make their breed unique. They are also family events in which both adults and children may participate. This allows parents and grandparents to teach the future generation what makes these dogs special and ensure that the unique abilities of these breeds will continue to be developed for generations to come.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- AKC Performance Events have increased by over 30,000 entries from the year 2000. At the end of 2009, over 4,000 performance events will have been held.
- Currently 125 different breeds are eligible to compete in AKC Performance Events
- Beagle field trials are the most popular AKC Performance Event.