

Region's dog parks gain popularity

By Luke E. Saladin

Post staff reporter

In 1998, Florida's Sarasota County decided to build a dog park after owners complained about an ordinance banning dogs from county parks.

On the first day, the 6-acre, 17th Street Paw Park, where dogs could mingle and run freely without a leash, drew 300 people and about 150 dogs.

Today, that park draws between 700 and 800 dogs a week, and that number doubles during the winter months when snowbirds make their way to the Sunshine State.

"It was a great success, probably the best opening of any passive park in Sarasota's park system at that time," said Dave Demarest, who oversaw the creation of the park for Sarasota County's system, which now has four dog parks, one connected to a dog beach, and another two in the works.

"We've sent a total of 198 packets of information on our dog parks all over the world — places like Saudi Arabia, Canada and every state in the union.

"Everyone is interested." That includes a lot of tri-state communities.

The Greater Cincinnati dog park numbers are about to more than double — from two in Ohio to five total in the region, including two in Northern Kentucky.

Last week, Fort Thomas opened the first new paw park on a 2-acre plot at the back of Highland Hills Park. A group in Anderson Township plans to open a 4-acre paw park at Kellogg Park in June. These new dog parks would augment the two already in Mount Airy Forest and in Schappacher Park in Deerfield Township.



JIM OSBORN/The Post

Sampson, an English bulldog, donned a mortar board and tassel for graduation last week from obedience classes at PETS MART in Florence. The store is backing a dog park in Kenton County.

The trend toward establishing dog parks is sweeping the nation, allowing people who live in subdivisions and apartments to let their dogs run free.

A group in Kenton County hopes to open another dog park, but still needs help raising the required start-up money.

The Friends of Kenton Paw Park wants to build a two-section dog park — one for big dogs, one for little ones — on 2 acres of Pioneer Park owned by Kenton County, but not in use.

The county has agreed to do-

nate the land, but only if the paw park committee can raise \$41,000 — enough to pay for construction and maintenance for four years.

The Friends have raised about \$30,000 and have several thousand dollars in in-kind donations committed from several businesses. They hope to open the paw park sometime this summer.

Advantage Lawn Care in Boone County, for instance, has committed to cut the grass for two years. Fedders J.H. Feed Co says it will donate the mulch. Paul Hemmer, Jr. of Paul Hemmer Companies,

has donated 40 trees that have already been planted.

"All we want is the land and permission to build — we'll take care of everything else," said Tom Biedenharn, one of the Friends organizers. "It's going to be done somewhere, with or without the Fiscal Court's help, but we want it to be at Pioneer because of its location."

Another business that has pledged to support the park — once the group establishes its nonprofit status with the Internal Revenue Service — is PETS MART, the nation's leading retail supplier of pet products and services, with 643 stores in the United States.

At the Hansel Avenue, Florence, location, employees have been stuffing promotional fliers for the park into customers' bags during checkout.

"The interest has really snowballed," said Judy Branam, assistant manager. "So many of our customers live in subdivisions or apartments, they really don't have a place where their dog can run."

Kenton County Deputy Judge-Executive Scott Kimmich is meeting with paw park committee members today to discuss the progress with the project.

"We want to see where we stand with the park and work toward the execution of a lease," Kimmich said. "When they have fulfilled their commitments, the issue needs to be taken before the Fiscal Court for approval."

That's no problem, said Biedenharn. "We've done everything they've asked us to do. We just want to get moving."

Anyone wishing to donate money, time or materials to the Kenton County project is asked to call Biedenharn at 859-341-4455 or visit www.kentonpawpark.com.