

Furry Friends 5k Saturday to support humane society

By Pam Chickering Wilson Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, May 27, 2015 8:24 am

JEFFERSON — The first-ever Furry Friends 5k last year raised almost \$24,000 for the Humane Society of Jefferson County, all of it going to the capital campaign for the organization's long-awaited new animal shelter.

As the second annual event approaches this weekend, the humane society is celebrating the recent opening of its shelter. And if this year's 5k proves as successful as last year's, that could put the capital campaign in reach of its goal.

After paying for the construction and outfitting of the facility, all future fundraising efforts could then go into the nonprofit organization's operations and direct care for animals.

This year's Furry Friends 5k will take place Saturday, May 30, at the Jefferson County Fair Park. Registration is open through the day of the race; however, participants are encouraged to sign up ahead online or from 1 to 7 p.m. Friday at the new humane society shelter.

The event came about thanks to Nora Wichman, who at age 10 came up with the idea of a 5k run/walk to benefit unwanted and homeless animals in the local area.

She already had taken part in several charity runs and wondered why there was no run for the Humane Society of Jefferson County.

"I've always loved animals and I wanted to help the humane society," said Nora, now 12. "I believe everyone can do their part."

While she's a little shy about serving as a spokesperson for the cause, Nora said, she thinks of her family's dog Mickey, and how he used to be a "stray."

"Then I think about how I can help other animals that don't have homes," she said.

Nora got the support of her parents, and her parents contacted humane society officials, who were very open to the idea. The family first stopped in to tour the existing shelter, a former dog kennel that had served the county for several decades and whose infrastructure was seriously deteriorating.

Nora found out how different animals wind up with the humane society — some of them are feral, some strays that once had a home, and others pets that had to be surrendered for various reasons, as when the owner grows too old to care for them or has to move somewhere else which does not allow pets.

As experienced runners, the Wichmans knew what a charity run entailed and all of the different steps to setting one up. Nora took an active part all along the way, helping to decide on the logo and T-shirt design.



FURRY FRIENDS 5K

This year's T-shirts will be made with Dri-Fit material rather than plain cotton, a change Nora insisted was "a must" for serious runners.

Nora, her father, Jake, and mother, Margo, visited Jefferson County Fair Park and looked at the grandstand as they sought a good location for the run.

The Wichmans used existing run sponsorship forms and amended them to apply to the Furry 5k, and they coordinated with humane society representatives to provide food, water and "goody bags" for participants in the race. They also talked to a timing company to ensure the event would be chip-timed for those tracking their running time.

Nora also visited local businesses with her family to seek sponsors. There are several levels of sponsorship. Platinum sponsors for this year include Nestle Purina PetCare, BKS Dental and the Daily Jefferson County Union.

Nora said it has been very gratifying to be part of such an important event, and through the money raised at the first-ever Furry Friends 5k, to be able to help the companion animals of Jefferson County.

"It's a lot of work and I've learned I have to be very organized," the 12-year-old said.

The first-ever Furry Friends 5k, in May of 2014, drew an incredible 457 humans and more than 150 canine participants. Some were serious runners interested in recording their times. For some, this marked their first 5k. Some ran. Some walked. Some pushed strollers. Some walked on four legs, wagging their tails behind them.

"The course is nice and flat, so it's good for all skill levels," said Sara Lastusky, community outreach coordinator for the humane society. "We had a lot of people last year mark their personal bests."

All finishers, human or canine, receive medals. The medals have been amended a little bit this year, but still carry the classic design. This year, participating canines will receive special dogtags.

As of last week, this year's run already had 400 participants registered, ahead of the number who had registered at that time last year.

"We already did the trailblazing, and I think the word is spreading about the event," Margo Wichman said.

Online registration is available through Wednesday, May 27.

On Friday, May 29, the shelter on Kiesling Road will be open for packet pick-up and day-before registrations from 1 to 7 p.m. However, people still can register on Saturday, with day-of registration running from 7 a.m. to 8:30 a.m.

Gift bags will be provided for the first 500 people to sign up.

The 5k will start promptly at 9 a.m.

The top three finishers in each category will receive prizes, with the categories including: boys 11 and under; girls 11 and under; boys 12-17, girls 12-17, men 18 and up, women 18 and up, and canines.

As a family-friendly and pet-centered event, the Furry Friends 5k is more than just a run, however. There will be music, concessions and a 50/50 raffle, and professional face painters will be on site to transform children and

adults into likenesses of their “furry friends.” Local Girl Scouts also will be doing temporary tattoos for children.

Christine Bellport, the co-host of “The Morning Show” on NBC 15, will serve as the guest of honor at this year’s 5k. Bellport launched the “Pet of the Week” segments on the NBC television station.

New this year, Danielle Bartz of the Humane Society of Jefferson County will provide a pet agility course on site.

In addition, Nestle Purina Petcare, the Daily Jefferson County Union, the Fort Atkinson Kennel Club, Johnson Creek Chiropractic, Badger Veterinary Care, Claws n Paws Pet Treats, Endurance House and doTERRA Essential Oils will have booths at the event.

Festivities will continue through 1 p.m. on Saturday.

“We at the humane society are so pleased that Nora has decided to add us to the list of charities she supports,” Lastusky said.

“The Furry Friends 5k was a major contributor to the new shelter project,” Sara said, noting that it gave the capital campaign a boost in publicity among people who were unaware of the project.

“It makes me really proud of our community, how they have pulled together around this cause,” Lastusky said.

“We hope to repeat that success with the second Furry Friends 5k,” she said. “It’s healthy fun: good for people, good for pets, and good for the community.”

Nora agreed.

“I am really happy with how last year’s 5k went and proud of everyone who participated to help out the animals,” Nora said. “There was a huge sense of accomplishment about being part of this whole thing.”

For more information, contact the Humane Society of Jefferson County by phone at (920) 674-2048 or email JeffersonFurryFriends@gmail.com.

People also may visit www.hsjc-wis.com or see the Furry Friends facebook page at www.facebook.com/FurryFriends5khsjc.