

FROM INSIDE THE SPORT

By Pat Trotter

ANOTHER LOOK AT CLUB DISSOLUTION

The demise of the Eugene Kennel Club addressed in my most recent column caused several respected dog fanciers to contact me on this troubling situation. For the Eugene Kennel Club is not alone in facing this issue, and thus we will look at several of the issues involving all breed kennel clubs that you generously shared with this writer. Your concerns and input compel me to present the problem one more time.

First and foremost, the Eugene Kennel Club, which will host its last dog shows on September 9th and 10th, was formed in 1948 after having roots growing in that direction for more than 20 years. In the early years there were few clubs in close proximity, so the club grew to where it truly served the needs of its location and purebred dogs. It provided services ranging from training classes, public relation booths at fairs, potluck dinners, fighting anti-dog legislation at the local level on a continuing basis and other activities designed to serve dogs well in interacting with the public. This was of course in addition to staging its annual dog shows which grew to become close to a 2000-dog show.

As the years went by, more and more of its members were lost due to various reasons including death of some and the formation of four other kennel clubs nearby. There simply were not enough members to go around. When the working membership dwindled down to 10, the club found it increasingly difficult to provide the services that once had been workable. And now three of those 10 persons will no longer be living in the general area due to career moves and relocations. So even though dog fanciers from remote locations offered to help EKC with on-line assistance as well as at the dog shows, the membership's desire to provide more than just dog shows for their community took precedence.

Rather than see the club disintegrate into what its members do not wish it to become, 21 of 25 listed members voted for dissolution. Now bear in mind that this was not a financial decision as the club still has a functioning

charities upon dissolution, and the club will take this action following its September shows and prior to its final closure in November.

Because I know individuals in the club personally, I can attest to the fact that the club kept its doors open to new members and encouraged others to join, but new members were few and far between. Because the other four clubs are based closer to where many dog fanciers reside, many opted for membership in those clubs closer to their homes. Again, in time there just were not that many potential members to fill all the various needs of the Eugene Kennel Club. Eugene is first and foremost a college town. Thus many of its activities revolve around the college as well as the intense track and field events that precede the Olympics and other world class track events. With the area staging as many as 18 track events a month, the available volunteer time of local dog owners is siphoned off. We must always keep in mind that kennel clubs are operated by volunteers.

One of the more troubling aspects of this situation as reported by club officials involved current AKC interaction with the club as described to me. When a designated EKC officer called AKC to report the club's dissolution, the response they received was anything but what one would expect. Did the individual ask "What can we do to help?" Did the individual seem empathetic to the problem? Indeed, not according to the Eugene Kennel Club spokesperson. The AKC responder seemed bent on blaming the kennel club members for not doing enough to see that their club endured. Has that person ever lifted heavy mats and laid them out **every week** plus put up ring stanchions so that training classes can take place while well past one's youth? Has that person ever tried to execute all the details of grounds and on site labor associated with staging dog shows? How about handling parking, clean-up and all the other intense labor associated with putting on dog shows? Training classes? Fair events? Etc. Perhaps a simple "we are saddened by this news and understand" would have sufficed

told that such a supportive response did go later via e-mail to the EKC. Hopefully it soothed feelings. However, if a club has the right to start up doesn't it have the right to shut down?

Evidently while attempting to put on Band-Aids, AKC leadership never considered how encouraging the proliferation of kennel clubs would serve to deplete the human resources of other long established clubs in the same area. Obviously there was no intention to create any long term problems. And certainly this is not just about decisions made by the powers that be, as life itself has taxed kennel clubs and our beloved sport beyond all expectations in recent years. Just the work of "animal rights" groups causing more and more anti-dog legislation forces people to move far out of town, and in time these good folks start another kennel club close to their homes. Add to that the prolific addition to non-dog activities unknown a few years back that spread people's interests, often too thin. Any number of outside influences have caused trouble for our sport. However, it would seem that AKC should prepare its staff to handle more of these calls with more sensitivity. Other clubs might also find themselves unable to carry on due to financial reasons, work force shortages and personal choices of its members.

Unfortunately, it is true that some clubs do not hang out the welcome mat to potential new members while others struggle to reach out for more. A respected long time dog fancier and multi-group judge reported to me that two clubs she asked to join were closed to new membership. Why is this? Do club members feel threatened by new members? Are we inadvertently contributing to future problems when a club restricts and limits membership? Closed clubs are nothing new and in years gone by more clubs were "owned" by vested membership than today. Nonetheless, I have known this lady for decades and she would be a working asset to any club! Another long time California elder of great wisdom shared this information about his club that at one time had a thousand members, and 125 of them actually worked the shows. Club brochures were available on the superintendent's table and invited the public to become involved. With large memberships, clubs are able to become a viable part of their community by providing services that encourage those communities to be user-friendly for our cause. Open arms and smiling faces can achieve much in all aspects of our sport to encourage participation.

Learning to become welcoming to the public is a lost art in much of our dog world and the entire world today. Perhaps we need to brush up on our common courtesy policy and learn to reach out to the public in more ways than just offering them pet care services and other commercial inducements. As a lover of dogs, each and every one of us needs to put our heads together and figure this out. Let's all agree that we are endangered, and therefore it becomes our mutual duty to understand that if we aren't part of the solution, we're part of the problem. Even as I acknowledge that many of us are long past our prime, I think of the words of Jonathon Livingston Seagull as written by Richard Bach: