



# familydog™

the  
youth  
issue



*Dog Writers Association  
of America*



*Puppy Triage:  
When Do You Need A Vet?*

*Flying High:  
The Junior Agility League*

MAY/JUNE 2024  
\$3.95





*A visitor admires an Old English Sheepdog sporting a Poodle's signature Continental clip.*

## **Kids and Canines Converge at AKC Meet the Breeds**

*A junior reports on AKC's biggest public-education event.* By Theo Bernstein

Every January, 1,500 dogs take over the Javits Center in midtown Manhattan for a weekend convention in which tens of thousands of canine lovers “meet the breeds.” As a cub reporter, I made my rounds throughout Sunday’s event to ask attendees and owners alike their opinions on the AKC’s highest profile function of the year.

The AKC recognizes more than 200 breeds, and it’s only at Meet the Breeds where people can experience and appreciate canine diversity up close. During

All photos John Ricard ©AKC except where noted.





Left: “Do I know you?” A Poodle meets a kindred spirit.

Below: Popular breeds, like the lovable Labrador Retriever and sweet, saucy Pembroke Welsh Corgi, had throngs of fans.



quick “man on the street” interviews, I expected to learn that people come to Meet the Breeds to seek out the rarest and strangest breeds they can find. Even though I have been going to dog shows since I was small, I still stopped in my tracks when I saw a booth for the Norrbottenspets and the Kromfohländer. Turns out, most people I met cited the chance to see their favorite breeds from when they were growing up as their main reason for coming to the event. Popular breeds like the Golden Retriever and Labrador Retriever had throngs of fans. The Beagle booth had a litter of puppies that stole the show. The most intriguing thing I saw was an Old English Sheepdog in a Poodle’s Continental cut. Her owner was a groomer who enjoyed a challenge.

### A New Look at Old Favorites

Talking to fanciers of breeds I’m familiar with reshaped my understanding of them. For instance, one man at the Lagotto Romagnolo booth told me all about his dog, Soffio, which means *murmur* in Italian.



“We live in Connecticut, and he is great at getting his ball or Frisbee on the beach when it goes into the water, because Lagottos were originally bred as water retrievers,” he explained. “They’re a very historic breed, so they are actually thought to be the source breed for all water dogs.” I had always thought of

Lagottos as truffle-hunting champs in the forests of the Umbria, Piedmont, and Tuscany regions of Italy, so I was not aware of these other talents. “This breed is a wonderful cuddler, and a great family dog.”

Many of the breed representatives I talked to weren’t shy about the sacrifices





*This Irish Terrier's face reflects the breed's temperament, filled with fire, animation, and a kind of reckless pluck that earned these dogs the nickname of "Daredevil."*



*Beagle puppies stole the show.*

of humor. For years, the Pembroke Welsh Corgi Club of America paid tribute to the breed's best known booster, Queen Elizabeth II, with club member Bobbe Lord in full costume.

### Finding Your Fit

When asked their opinion of the event, many club representatives underscored the educational significance of Meet the Breeds. As a Belgian Tervuren handler told me, "It's one thing to read about some breeds online, but it's another thing—and so much better—to see them in person."

One of the most important pieces of advice that AKC offers to prospective dog owners is the idea of doing your research before deciding on a breed. This is one of the first steps in AKC's playbook about responsible pet ownership. They counsel people to learn as much as they can to identify breeds that will fit our lifestyle the best. For example, if your dream is to run around the Jacqueline

they made to bring their dogs to the Javits Center, but they insist it's worth it. I knew about this from my days assisting the Cardigan Welsh Corgi Club of America's booth in years past. It takes a lot of planning to round up volunteers

and dogs for a full two days in the city, and just getting here can be a big effort. Keeping dogs and owners on their toes to interact with thousands of people throughout a whole weekend requires a lot of concentration, patience, and a sense





*In the Kids' Zone, children had a chance to take a whirl at being agility stars!*

Kennedy Onassis Reservoir in Central Park every morning before work, you might prefer a Vizsla to a Basset Hound. If your doorbell tends to ring a lot, you might prefer a quiet Basenji to a vocal Shetland Sheepdog. An event like AKC Meet the Breeds is the best place to talk to breeders and fanciers to ask those questions about fit, and get your hands on the types of dogs who could be the sort of companion you are looking for.

### At Work and Play

Even though you could spend the whole weekend (or more!) going from booth to booth learning about all of the breeds, there were plenty of other ways to stay busy and engaged at Meet the Breeds. The demonstration ring in the middle of the convention center was filled throughout the day with all kinds of performances and interactive

activities. I especially liked watching the agility dogs and the police K-9 dogs showing off their skills. I got to meet some of the K-9s at the German Shepherd Dog booth as well. K-9 Officer Michael Andrel and his dog K-9 Zepar from the Darby Township, Pennsylvania police department handed out baseball cards, which I was happy to add to my collection. It was interesting to learn that the police dogs live with the officers and their families. Even though they are working dogs, they are also pets. Can you imagine if your dog warmed your couch one day and tracked bad guys the next?

### Dog Store

For people who like to buy merch, AKC Meet the Breeds hits all the right notes. You can get stuffed animals, shirts, magnets and all kinds of branded things at two different AKC stores inside the

venue. The whole event is sponsored by Purina ProPlan, so mounds of dog food samples were free for the taking. Purina also had a staff veterinarian on hand to talk about nutrition and canine body conditioning. Dr. RuthAnn Lobos demonstrated “the healthy hug” on Sallie, the dog I train for AKC Junior Showmanship. According to Dr. Lobos, you want to make sure your dog’s rib cage is lower than its belly, creating what is known as a “tuck up.” If you think your dog is overweight, talk to your dog’s breeder or a vet who will point out what Dr. Lobos calls “areas of opportunity.” I like that expression because sometimes we love our dogs so much, we overfeed them, and there is no reason to shame people if their dogs need to go on a diet!

AKC Meet the Breeds is a dream event for kids who like animals. I don’t





*Flying disc dogs and courageous police K-9s (next page) were among the outstanding athletes who exhibited their best moves throughout the day.*

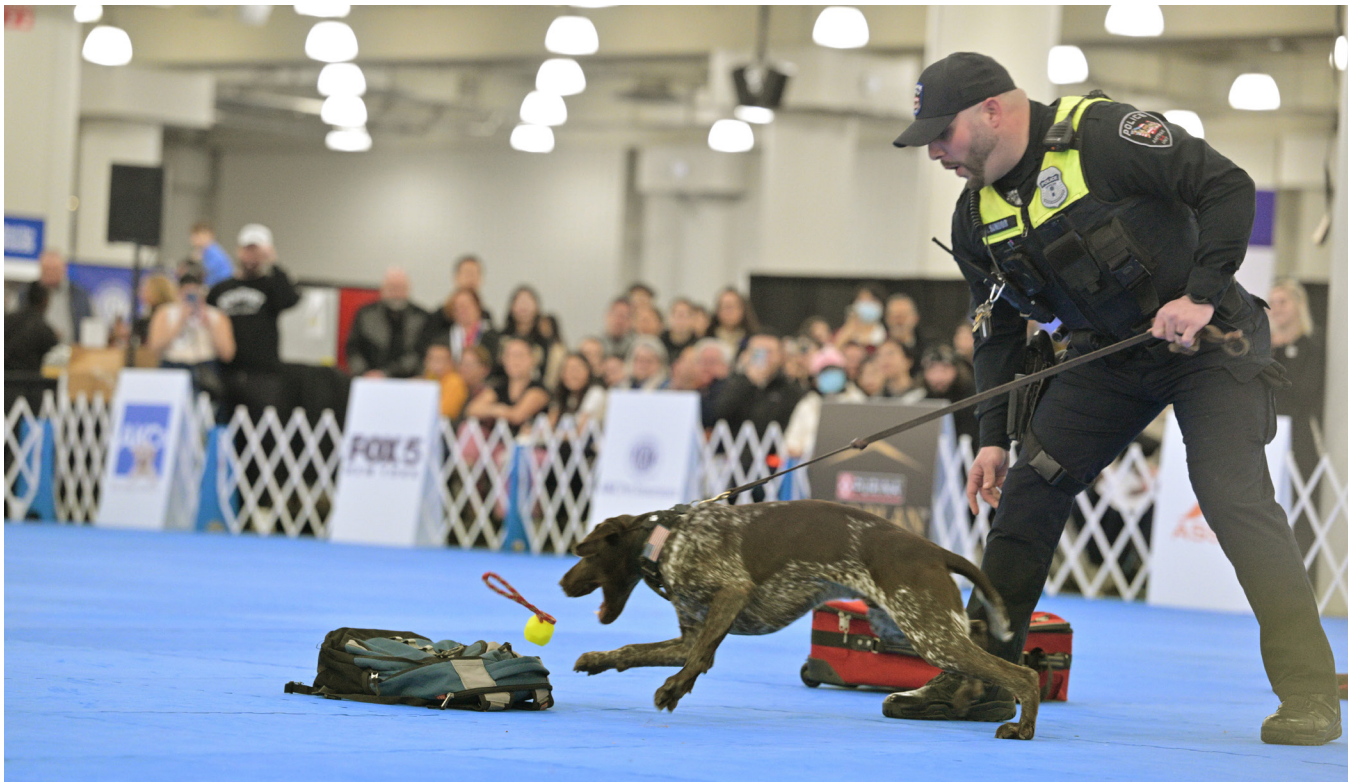
know too many who don't. Kids of all ages wandered past the booths, and groups of kids in team uniforms made their way through scavenger hunts to identify as many breeds as they could. The Kids' Zone was packed all day with a kid agility course and other fun games. A balloon artist produced a lot of smiles on young faces. I also noticed there

were more kids assisting their parents at breed booths than any in previous years. A little boy sat at the Komondor booth and issued amazing explanations about his corded breed to curious onlookers.

When I spent some time helping my friends out at the booth of my own breed, Cardigan Welsh Corgis, a boy came up to me and asked longingly

about his favorite Corgi from last year. Unfortunately, the boy had missed his old friend Damian, who spent much of Saturday accepting belly rubs. It blew my mind that our dogs create such an impression on others year after year. Moments like those show the power of AKC Meet the Breeds to connect humans to our best friends.





The author and his Cardigan Welsh Corgi, Maisy

Bottom right: Courtesy author

If you didn't get a chance to come to the Javits this year, you can still get a taste of the action on AKCtv. A professional television crew roamed the aisles talking to some of the breeders and asking ticket buyers about the highlights. When a reporter asked me about how to get into the dog world, I said that going to events like Meet the Breeds

and local dog shows are the best way to learn and get started. It takes a lot to get people off their screens these days, and age is no exception to that fact. Getting out to an in-person event like Meet the Breeds, where you can get up close and personal with breeds of all kinds, is such a valuable experience. After the pandemic, humans crave interaction more than

ever. Luckily, the AKC Meet the Breeds dogs and their clubs were willing and able to answer the call. **FD**

---

*Theo Bernstein is a Cardigan Welsh Corgi fancier and junior handler residing in New York City. Currently in the ninth grade, he is a two-time winner of the DWAA Junior Writers Award.*