

PET WELLNESS

MAY 2023

SASKATOON
STARPHOENIX

Grab your leash,
get out and
get active!

Page 20

Does your pet
have an allergy?
Call in the pet
detectives.

Page 14



PET LICENSING

LICENSING PROVIDES PEACE OF MIND!

If your pet ever escapes, a valid pet license provides identification, safe shelter and direct return home.

Purchase or renew your pet license online at saskatoon.ca/petlicensing or visit one of our pet license vendors.

VENDORS

Cumberland Veterinary Clinic
#20 - 1010 Taylor Street E.

Early's Farm & Garden Centre
2615 Lorne Avenue

Early's Farm & Garden Centre
502 51st Street E.

Erindale Animal Hospital
#11 - 410 Ludlow Street

Pet-I-Coat Junction & Barkery
110 Wedge Road, Unit 6

Pet Planet
40 - 1519 8th Street

Saskatoon Animal Control
1925 Avenue B N.

Saskatoon SPCA
5028 Clarence Avenue S.

PET LICENSING FEES

DOG

Spayed/Neutered	\$31
Not Spayed or Neutered	\$62
Juvenile (Under 1 Year)	\$31
Replacement Tag	\$10

CAT

Spayed/Neutered	\$19
Not Spayed or Neutered	\$42
Juvenile (Under 1 Year)	\$19
Replacement Tag	\$10



DOG DAY OF SUMMER

FREE END OF SEASON
LICENSED POOCH SWIM

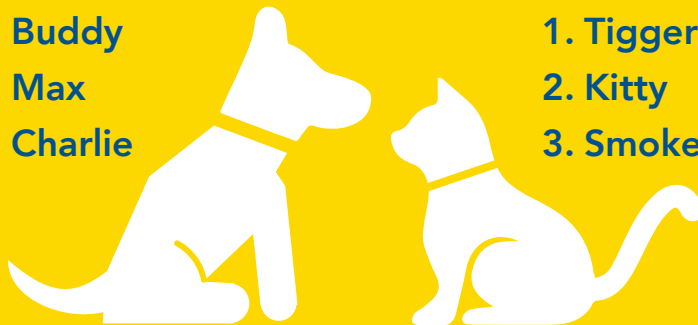
MAYFAIR POOL
1025 AVE F NORTH

For updates please visit
saskatoon.ca/dogdayofsummer

2023

SASKATOON'S TOP PET NAMES

1. Buddy
2. Max
3. Charlie



1. Tigger
2. Kitty
3. Smokey



PET WELLNESS



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All pets must be on a leash unless in a designated off-leash area.





The City of Saskatoon requires that all cats and dogs over the age of four months have a valid pet license. That license will identify your pet if it is at large and help ensure a safe return home. (PHOTOS: CITY OF SASKATOON)

Responsible pet ownership a *priority* for City of Saskatoon Animal Services

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

Pet owners who are in the know stay informed with the help of the City of Saskatoon's Animal Services web pages: saskatoon.ca/animalservices.

Here, Saskatoon residents can do everything from purchasing their annual dog and cat licenses to learning about new pet programs, pet-friendly special events, the latest dog park developments and changes to Bylaws affecting pet owners.

"Responsible Pet Ownership is a fundamental priority for Animal Services. Our team focuses on implementing a variety of programs and initiatives including Pet Licensing, Dog Parks, the Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program and oversees the contracts for Bylaw enforcement and poundkeeping services," says Melissa Meacham, open space consultant with Animal Services.

LICENSE YOUR PET

It's easier than ever to purchase a license for your dog or cat, says Meacham.

The annual licenses can be purchased online at saskatoon.ca/petonline, at City Hall, or from participating vendors. (See page 2 of this guide for a complete list of pet license vendors)

"It's a priority of ours to ensure that all pet owners are getting a dog or cat license. The



Dog licenses as low as \$31/year.





In addition to 11 existing dog parks, the City of Saskatoon will open two new off-leash areas dedicated to smaller-size dogs in Summer 2023, located at Hyde Park and Charlottetown Park.

license not only helps identify the animal if it is at large, it assists our animal control agency to return that animal to the owner. If the animal does go to the pound, the officers can retrieve the owners' contact information from the license database and arrange for that animal to be returned home safely," says Meacham.

"Revenue from pet licenses goes back into the programs the City of Saskatoon provides to pet owners, whether it's the Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program, Bylaw

enforcement, pound services or dog park development. Every pet license purchased provides opportunities for our programs to grow and new initiatives to be fostered."

DOG PARK NEWS

With 11 off-leash dog parks in Saskatoon, there are plenty of opportunities for pooches in our city to enjoy the great outdoors. And here's even more great news! Two new off-leash areas dedicated to smaller-size dogs will open in Summer 2023, located at Hyde

Park and Charlottetown Park.

To make the off-leash experience even more enjoyable for all users, last year Animal Services introduced dog behaviour awareness training sessions as a pilot program at various dog parks throughout the city. "We worked with Align Canine Training to provide training sessions at the dog parks. We had over 250 people attend the sessions throughout the summer, which was very positive," says Meacham.

Based on the success of that pilot program, the behaviour awareness training sessions will be offered again, from just after the May long weekend through to the end of September at different off-leash parks in Saskatoon. Sessions are free to the public; registration is not required.

When visiting an off-leash park, it's important for dog owners to pay attention to how their animal interacts with people and other animals. For example, a dog who is open to fun with other dogs could express that through playful bows, a wiggly body, pawing the air or bouncy gestures. An anxious or fearful dog may pin its ears back, whine or whimper and tuck its tail. Signs of aggressive behavior could include staring at another dog with a fixed gaze, bullying, raising its hackles, showing its teeth or snarling.

"The training sessions are designed to help owners become more aware of their dog's behaviours and how to interpret their dog's body language. With that knowledge, the dog owner can recall their animal and correct the behavior before a situation occurs in the dog park," says Meacham.

The 20-minute presentations also include reminders about dog park etiquette, followed by a Q&A session. "All dogs are required to be on-leash during the session, so owners have control over their animals during that time."

The schedule of training sessions is posted online at saskatoon.ca/dogparks.

Another way to help enhance the off-leash park experience is to participate in the "Scoop the Poop" events taking place at your favourite dog park this season. Join your neighbours in helping to keep our dog parks



To make the off-leash experience even more enjoyable for all users, Animal Services is offering free dog behaviour awareness training sessions, from May through September, at different dog parks across the city.

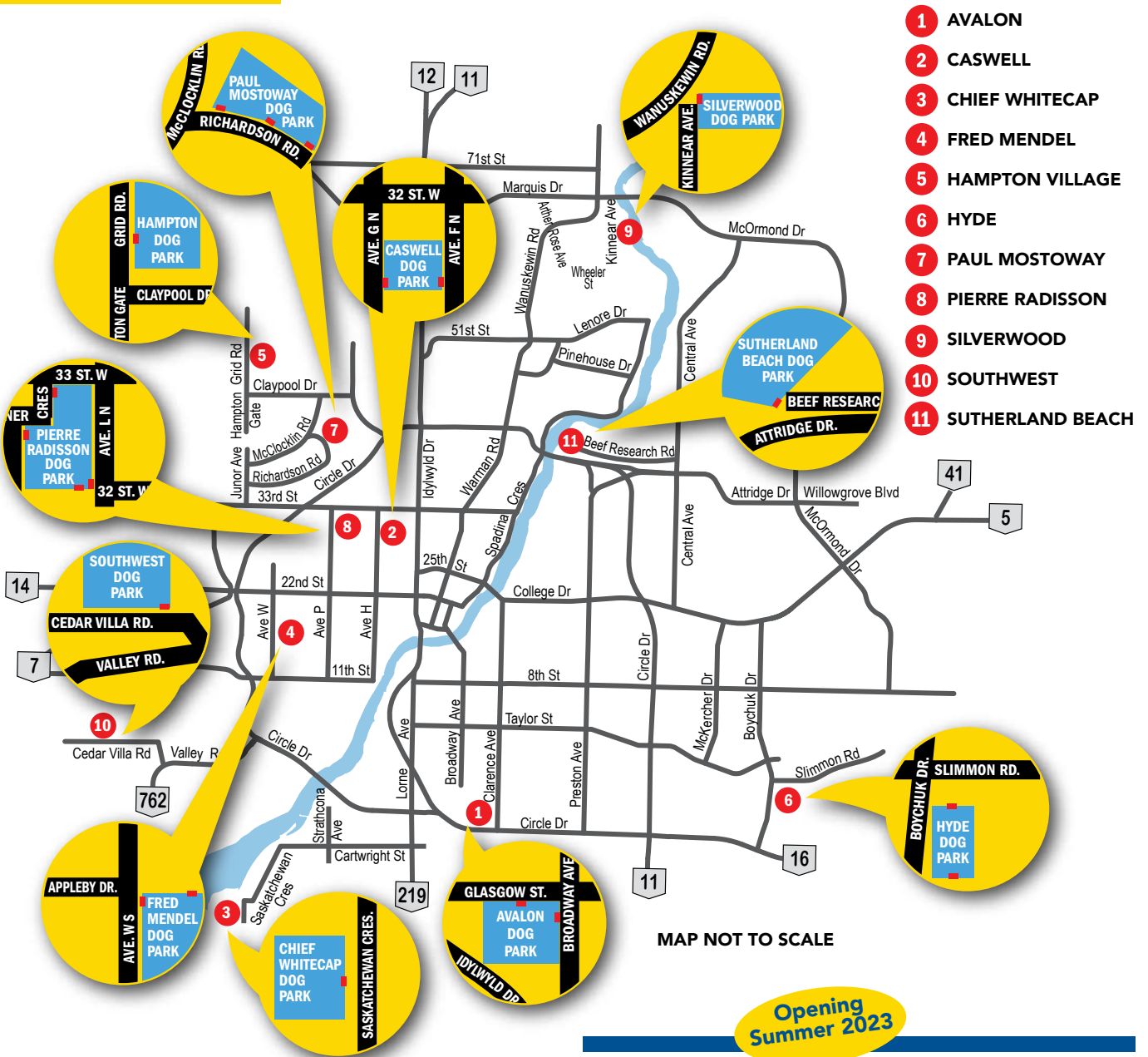
CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

IT'S YOUR DOODY!

Dog feces do not fertilize the ground and have negative effects on grass and plants. Be a good neighbour and clean up after your pet.



DOG PARKS



MAP NOT TO SCALE

Opening Summer 2023

NEW! Dog Parks for Small Dogs
 The City of Saskatoon will be adding two new Dog Parks dedicated for small dogs. Dogs must be under 40 cm (16") at the shoulder and less than 9 kg (20 lbs).

All dogs must have a current pet license to access the dog parks. For more information on Dog Park openings & closures, visit saskatoon.ca/dogparks.

DOG PARK ETIQUETTE

- Your pet license is like an all-access pass to Saskatoon's Dog Parks. Only licensed dogs are invited to play!
- Be a good buddy and interact with your dog, keeping him or her within sight at all times. Off-leash doesn't mean unattended.
- Scoop your dog's poop. Bring a few extra baggies, just in case.
- Play nice! Your dog should know and obey basic commands of come, sit and stay before visiting a Dog Park.
- If you take a toy to the park, expect other dogs to play with it. Better yet, leave the toys at home.
- If you have concerns about the behaviour of a dog or its owner while at the park, contact the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency at 306-385-PETS (7387).
- Have fun! When dogs and owners play by the rules, everyone has a good time!

beautiful. Coffee and treats will be provided. Look for details online at saskatoon.ca/dogparks.

BYLAW AMENDMENTS

Saskatoon is considered one of the most pet-friendly cities in Canada. To ensure that pet owners and their animals feel safe and welcome, the City of Saskatoon has established the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animals Bylaw.

To ensure these Bylaws are kept up to date and meet the needs of the community, they are reviewed every two years by City of Saskatoon administration and the Animal Services Working Group. “The Animal Services Working Group is a group of specialists in their field — animal experts as well as citizen representatives. We work collaboratively on reviewing those Bylaws and determining what changes need to occur,” says Meacham.

In its 2019 review, an amendment was made to the Animal Control Bylaw that limited the number of dogs that one individual can take into an off-leash park to four dogs. An exception was made to the Bylaw for commercial dog walkers. A permit program was developed that allows the qualified dog walker to exercise up to eight

licensed dogs at the same time.

“To qualify, the commercial dog walker must submit an application, provide their business license and pass a compliance test that is conducted by the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency. If they pass that test they get a commercial dog walker permit from the City,” says Meacham.

The commercial dog walkers can utilize four of the larger off-leash parks in Saskatoon: Sutherland Beach, Southwest, Hampton Village and Chief Whitecap.

The 2022 review saw an amendment to the section of the Animal Control Bylaw pertaining to exotic and wild animals. In alignment with recent changes to the Government of Saskatchewan’s Captive Wildlife Allowed Species List, certain species of boas and pythons will now be allowed within the City of Saskatoon.

“The Bylaw was also amended to enable ticketing for nuisance behaviours in areas other than off-leash parks. Prior to this amendment, it was only for off-leash areas. The regulation now extends beyond that,” says Meacham.

Bylaw amendments reflect what’s going on in the community, says Meacham. “With the changes to the provincial government’s exotic species list, we had residents asking if the City of Saskatoon was going to amend its

Bylaw. We also consider recommendations that are identified and brought forward by the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency. We’ll begin our next review of the Bylaws in the late fall or the first quarter of 2024. Any recommendations will be forwarded to committee and City Council in the fall of 2024.”

To keep up to date on the latest services, programs and regulations regarding pet ownership, visit: saskatoon.ca/animalservices.



Revenue from pet licenses help to fund dog park programming and development, bylaw enforcement, pound services, the Subsidized Spay and Neuter Program (SSNP) and city-wide pet events including the annual Dog Day of Summer pool party.

New this summer
Pawsitive Pups
 Training Classes

- Positive Reinforcement
- Expert Trainers
- Small Class Sizes

Exciting new programs

- Office Foster Cats
- Adoption Ambassadors
- Borrowed Buddies

For more information visit:
www.saskatoonspca.com

SPCA
 SASKATOON

How to have the best time ever at the dog park

BY JENNY GABRUCH

Saskatoon's 13 off-leash dog parks are great places for your dog to romp around, socialize and get much needed exercise.

There are 11 existing parks and two being developed for smaller-size dogs. Doing your homework will ensure that you and your pooch have the best time ever when visiting the dog park.

"People should first consider if they are ready for an off-leash experience," says Melissa Meacham, open space consultant with the City of Saskatoon's Animal Services.

"Owners need to ensure they have their dog always in eyesight and under control at all times," she says. "Having your animal understand basic obedience commands as well as having recall over your animal is important to ensure everyone's safety."

If you are not sure where to start and would like some assistance in learning how to maintain control of your dog, Meacham suggests people consider taking obedience classes or hiring a professional dog trainer.

People should also decide which of the 11 off-leash parks will offer the best experience for them, as the parks vary in size and terrain.

"Chief Whitecap, Sutherland Beach and Hampton Village offer a large space to roam and explore while making it feel like you've escaped the city," says Meacham.

"Other parks are close to residential areas, which allow convenience for an off-leash experience for your dog to get the 'zoomies' out while going on a walk within the neighbourhood," she says.

A valid dog license is required to access any

1 MILLION DOG PARK VISITS

In 2022, Animal Services estimated more than 600,000 visits at Saskatoon's dog parks between May and December, with approximately 1 million visits annually to all 11 off-leash parks.

dog park and owners should ensure their dog has up-to-date vaccinations.

City Council approved construction of two off-leash areas for small dogs at Hyde Park and Charlottetown Park, which are expected to open this summer.

The parks will feature concrete pads in the entryway to prevent erosion. At Charlottetown



Each off-leash park in Saskatoon offers a different user experience. The three largest parks — Chief Whitecap, Sutherland Beach and Hampton Village — provide dogs with plenty of space to run and play in a natural environment. Small urban parks are conveniently located in a variety of neighbourhoods, close to home. (PHOTOS: CITY OF SASKATOON)



BECOME A DOG PARK AMBASSADOR!

Volunteer at your local dog park.

saskatoon.ca/dogparks



Saskatoon City Council has approved construction of two off-leash areas for small dogs at Hyde Park and Charlottetown Park. Dogs must be under 40 cm (16") at the shoulder and less than 9 kg (20 lbs). The Dog Parks are expected to open this summer.



Park, there will be a dual-gate entry to ensure dogs don't get in or out accidentally and naturalized elements including mature shade trees.

To enter these parks, dogs must weigh 20 pounds or less, with a maximum height of 16 inches at the shoulder.

DOG PARK AMBASSADORS

Another way to contribute to a great user experience is to become a dog park ambassador. It's a City of Saskatoon volunteer program designed to assist Animal Services in monitoring conditions of the off-leash parks and provide input for improvements.

The program also fosters responsible pet ownership and dog park etiquette. This includes ensuring dogs are always within sight and in control, picking up after them and making sure the dog is not aggressive toward others.

Sheila Anderson became a dog park ambassador in the summer of 2022. She and her dog Charlie, a five-year-old Corgi, moved to Caswell Hill in the fall of 2021, and visit the neighbourhood dog park daily.

"The dog park has been the

hub of the community for many years," she says. "It has been instrumental in Charlie and I making many new friends in the community and getting to know our neighbours. Because there are so many regulars, dogs and owners have developed many friends."

This leads to fewer issues between dogs and owners, she says.

"When there is an occasional issue between owners, I can assist in getting the conversation started around effective problem solving, or finding solutions and compromises so everyone can continue to use the park, feel safe and welcomed."

Anderson launched a new Caswell Hill Dog Park Community Facebook page, where people can share photos, tips and information about dog behavior.

"We can post animals at large in the community and it's also a way for me to update folks on any city initiatives for the park," she says.

Anderson enjoys the interaction at the off-leash park, both human and canine.

"The dog park is very important to many of our users," she says. "It

is a way for folks to get out of the house, get some fresh air, make friends and feel less isolated."

She encourages other dog lovers to join the ambassador program to create a more positive experience for dogs and owners alike.

"If you love dogs, enjoy building relationships, want to create a sense of community and have good intentions to problem-solving, the dog ambassador program would be a great fit," she says. "Everyone, including you and your dog, will benefit."

An advertisement for Lianne Matieshin Photography. It features a professional seal in the top left corner that reads "ACCREDITED" and "INDUSTRIAL PHOTOGRAPHER". The name "LIANNE MATIESHIN PHOTOGRAPHY" is written in a light blue, cursive font. Below the name is a photograph of a brown French Bulldog standing on a white background. To the right of the dog, the text "Specializing in Pet, Equine & Animal Sport Photography" is written in a black, sans-serif font. At the bottom right, there are icons for Facebook and Instagram. The website address "WWW.LIANNEMATIESHINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM" is printed at the bottom.



In 2022, Saskatoon Animal Control officers were able to return 276 dogs and 106 cats to their homes because their owners had licensed their pets. (PHOTOS: CITY OF SASKATOON)

To serve and protect: Saskatoon Animal Control Agency

BY JEANNIE ARMSTRONG

Keeping our community safe — humans and animals alike — is a top priority for the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA).

The agency, under the direction of president Eva Alexandrovici, is contracted by the City of Saskatoon to provide enforcement of the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animal Bylaw, as well as to provide animal control services. The contract is reviewed every five years by the City of Saskatoon. Pound services are contracted to the Saskatoon SPCA.

“We are here for the protection of people and animals,” says Alexandrovici. “We want to make sure that everyone is living in harmony, are safe and looked after.”

Every year, the dedicated team of Animal Control Officers responds to an increasing number of calls from the community — ranging from reports of dogs and cats at large to complaints of nuisance barking, accumulation of dog feces and reports of dog bites.

ANIMAL CONTROL BYLAW

There are five main components to the

City of Saskatoon’s Animal Control Bylaw (#7860). The Bylaw’s purpose is:

- to provide for the licensing of cats and dogs;
- to control and regulate cats and dogs;
- to provide for the impounding of cats and dogs;
- to control and regulate pigeons and bees;
- to control and regulate exotic and wild animals.

“A big part of our role as the bylaw enforcement agency involves pet licensing,” says Alexandrovici. “It is the law that you have to have your dog and cat licensed by the City of Saskatoon. The license fees are very reasonable. For a dog, it can be as low as \$31 per year; for a cat it can be as low as \$19 per year. Those fees do go up if your animal is not spayed or neutered. An intact dog is \$62 annually; an intact cat is \$42.”

Owners who fail to license their pets or renew that license annually are subject to a minimum fine of \$250.

There are many benefits to licensing your dog or cat. A license helps SACA officers identify your dog or cat if it is found running

at large, outside your property. “We can have numerous contact numbers in the license database, making it easier to reunite the animal with the owner. Microchips also are recommended as a permanent means of identification. A dog or cat can lose its collar and tags, but not the microchip. The microchip can be registered along with your pet’s license, but you are still required to purchase a license from the City of Saskatoon annually,” says Alexandrovici.

SACA officers respond daily to calls from Saskatoon residents about dogs and cats that are running at large. In 2022, the SACA team picked up 749 dogs and returned 276 to their owners; 473 went to the pound at the SPCA because they weren’t licensed and didn’t have identification.

The officers picked up 1,601 cats in 2022; sadly, 1,496 cats were taken to the SPCA because their owners couldn’t be identified.

Under the Animal Control Bylaw, SACA officers are required to issue a fine of \$100 to the owner of a dog or cat that is caught running at large. If the animal isn’t licensed, an additional \$250 fine is applied.

“The City of Saskatoon’s Pet-At-Large (PAL) Perk is a big benefit,” says Alexandrovici. The PAL Perk can be applied once during the lifetime of the animal to waive the \$100 fine for running at large. The SACA officer can return the animal to its owner at no cost. If the owner can’t be contacted immediately and the animal is taken to the Saskatoon SPCA, the PAL Perk also means that pound fees are waived.

SACA officers also enforce the City of Saskatoon’s license requirements at off-leash dog parks. “Any dog that enters an off-leash park has to have a license from the City of Saskatoon. If it’s a visiting animal, it is required to have a license in the jurisdiction where the dog lives. Owners also have to carry a leash with them and make sure that the dog is well behaved, is under verbal control at all times and doesn’t become a nuisance,” she says.

“We also patrol areas in Saskatoon where pets are prohibited, such as playgrounds. There are some parks and posted areas in Saskatoon where pets are also prohibited.”

Among the complaints SACA officers respond to are barking dogs. “We’ll take the complaint over the phone and then we’ll mail out forms for the complainant to fill out, including a questionnaire and a ‘bark log’ to document the times and dates of the barking incidents. It’s up to the complainant if they want a warning or a notice of violation issued to the dog owner,” says Alexandrovici.

“We also educate the dog owner on ways to help prevent the barking. The easiest way to prevent barking is to not leave the dog unattended in the yard. When you’re not home, your dog could be barking and you wouldn’t even know.”

Complaints about animal feces are also common. “The Animal Control Bylaw has two different sections that deal with feces complaints. One involves an accumulation on the owner’s property. The second is if someone is walking their dog and it defecates and the owner fails to pick it up. We deal with both of these offenses,” she says.

The Animal Control Bylaw isn’t just about dogs and cats. You may be surprised to learn it extends to domestic pigeons, as well as exotic animals.

“If you wish to have domestic pigeons in your yard, you have to apply to City of Saskatoon Animal Services for a permit to build a loft. You will get a visit from one of our SACA officers to make sure that everything is up to code. Zoning inspectors will also come out to make sure the structure meets required standards. We follow up on these pigeon inspections every two to three years, or more frequently if we get complaints,”

says Alexandrovici.

SACA also has the responsibility to regulate ownership of exotic animals in our city. “The Animal Control Bylaw has a list of prohibited animals and if we receive a complaint that someone is harboring an animal that’s on the prohibited list, we go investigate,” says Alexandrovici. Banned animals range from arachnids and bats to chickens, sheep, goats and pigs.

In alignment with recent changes to provincial regulations, the City of Saskatoon’s Animal Control Bylaw was amended on January 25, 2023, to allow specific types of boa and python snakes.

“The most common complaint we receive in regards to exotic animals involves chickens. The Bylaw is a tool to educate people. Most people cooperate once they are informed about the Bylaw regulations and will relocate the animal,” says Alexandrovici.

DANGEROUS ANIMAL BYLAW

SACA’s highest priority calls involve concerns about dangerous animals, primarily dogs.

Under the Dangerous Animals Bylaw #8176, an animal may be declared dangerous if it:

- chases or approaches a person or domestic animal in a vicious or menacing manner, without provocation;
- is known to attack without provocation;
- has bitten, inflicted injury or attacked a person or domestic animal without provocation.

It’s not necessary to have been bitten to call SACA about a dangerous animal.

“We ask the complainant to tell us what happened. Sometimes the animal is not actually dangerous. It could be a nuisance behavior versus being dangerous and aggressive. In this case, we can use a new section of the Animal Control Bylaw (Section 15.1) that regulates nuisance behavior and issue a violation to the owner,” she explains.



Every year, the Saskatoon Animal Control Team responds to an increasing number of calls from the community — ranging from reports of dogs and cats at large to complaints of nuisance barking, accumulation of dog feces and reports of dog bites.

“If a human or another animal is bitten by a dog or cat, we come out and take their statement right away. We need to get photos of the injuries, and speak with the animal’s owner. All bite incidents have to be reported to Public Health within 24 hours. Rabies is a concern and we want to make sure the animal is vaccinated. If not, the animal will be put under quarantine for 10 days.”

A Dangerous Animal complaint could result in a hearing at Provincial Court to determine if the animal is dangerous. If the Court deems the animal dangerous, the judge may require the animal to be muzzled and leashed, kept in the house or in a locked enclosure on the property, be microchipped, as well as be spayed or neutered.

The Court may also require that the owner display a sign issued by the City of Saskatoon or SACA warning others that a dangerous animal lives on the premises.

“Lately, we have seen judges order the dogs to go for behavior training. It can be helpful when it comes to an animal with behavioural issues,” says Alexandrovici.

Failure to comply with the Court order could result in a fine, ranging from \$500 to \$10,000, and even imprisonment for up to one year.

“If it’s a serious case or the owner refuses to comply with the Court’s orders or has proven to be an irresponsible pet owner, the judge may also order that the animal be destroyed,” she says. The animal’s owner has seven days to appeal the judge’s ruling.

“We do take these dangerous animal complaints very seriously. We want to make sure that everyone is safe,” says Alexandrovici.

To learn more about the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animal Bylaw, visit the City of Saskatoon’s Animal Services website at saskatoon.ca/animalservices. You can also call the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency at (306) 385-7387.

SSNP Program *supports* responsible pet ownership *for all*

BY ELIZABETH IRELAND

One of the biggest components of being a responsible pet owner is spaying or neutering your pet to prevent unwanted kittens or puppies.

Saskatoon's Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program (SSNP) is a collaborative initiative of the City of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Academy of Veterinary Practitioners. The program provides lower-income pet owners with access to significantly discounted spay and neuter veterinary services.

About 80 per cent of the pets in the program are cats and 20 per cent are dogs. The program does not include exotic pets and is offered to permanent residents of

the City of Saskatoon.

Melissa Meacham is an open space consultant with the City of Saskatoon's Animal Services department. "Over the past five years, about 1,000 pets have been spayed or neutered through our SSNP. The program allows for two animals per household per year to be subsidized," says Meacham.

The income criteria for eligibility is available on the SSNP webpage and is based on Statistics Canada data. For example, to qualify, the household income for two people would need to fall below \$34,254 in 2022. Applications need to include proof of income (a Notice of Assessment from Canada Revenue Agency for

the pet owner and their spouse or partner) and proof of City of Saskatoon residency (such as a cable or utility bill).

Two appointments must be booked with a participating veterinarian to fulfill the requirements of the SSNP process. The first appointment is a pre-operative examination to determine the pet's suitability for surgery, based on body condition and other factors. The examination will make sure that the cat or dog is healthy enough to stay safe while under anesthesia. If the cat or dog is suitable for surgery, relevant vaccines will also be given at the first appointment.

At the second appointment, booked at the same clinic, the spay or neuter surgery takes place and the animal is given booster vaccinations. Pet owners are responsible for transporting their pet to and from the veterinary clinic for all scheduled appointments.

Successful SSNP applicants, if not already licensed, will also receive a free City of Saskatoon pet license valid for one year. After that, pet owners are responsible for renewing their pet license annually at regular license rates. "We currently have four veterinary clinics in the city participating in SSNP and we are open to other clinics joining the program. Spaying or neutering and licensing your pet are so important," says Meacham.

Dr. Inoka Gamage of Fairlight Veterinary Services is involved in the program. Her veterinary clinic is located in the Fairhaven neighbourhood of Saskatoon. She owns three dogs and two cats of



It's important for people to spay or neuter their pets to help reduce the number of unwanted animals in our community, says Dr. Inoka Gamage. (SUPPLIED)

her own and considers them part of her family.

Dr. Gamage supports the program because spaying and neutering are "really important. I love being a part of the program." Dr. Gamage wants lower-income residents in Saskatoon to know how to apply for SSNP, particularly if they own multiple pets. All qualified SSNP applicants will need to submit completed documentation and are encouraged to apply by mail or in person at City Hall, 222 3rd Avenue North, from Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The process involves a non-refundable SSNP fee of \$25 for a cat or \$40 for a dog (this fee may only be paid in cash or through a debit transaction). Find out more at saskatoon.ca/ssnp.

THANKS

to these veterinary clinics for their support of the Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program:

Erindale Animal Hospital
Fairlight Veterinary Services
Forest Grove Veterinary Clinic
Stonebridge Veterinary Hospital

Pet Loss Support

The death of a pet can be one of the most devastating experiences an individual or family has to face. If you are having difficulty coping with the loss of a beloved pet or are dealing with an end of life decision, you are invited to gather with other animal lovers, like yourself, in a safe, supportive and informal environment to share your experiences, feelings, stories and pictures.

The Pet Loss Support Group

meets the first & third Sunday of every month at 2pm 210A 33rd Street East, Saskatoon. (There's no cost to participate and no obligation to attend on a regular basis). For more information or to receive bereavement resource material, we invite you to call

Family Pet - 306-343-5322

210A 33rd Street East, Saskatoon

EDWARDS
FAMILY CENTRE

Family Pet
CREMATION
SERVICES



Summer **heat** poses a real **danger** to pets

BY GERALD VANDER PYL

When summer arrives, it can bring with it temperatures that make it uncomfortable for people to be outdoors — and the same is true for your beloved pets.

Dr. Vivienne Jones, veterinarian and owner of Erindale Animal Hospital, says protecting your pet starts with the kind of common sense decisions that people make for themselves on hot days.

Jones says make sure your pet has plenty of water available. Don't take it for a two-hour walk in 35-degree weather. If left outdoors, provide it with a cool space with shade and not on a sunny patio with concrete that soaks up heat.

She says animals can get heat stroke from over-exertion in hot weather, just like humans.

"They can have heat stress when they are just panting," says Jones. Panting is how dogs eliminate heat from their bodies, unlike humans who sweat.

"With dogs you see their tongue gets longer in their mouth and they start to drool and search for shady spots to sit down," says Jones.

"But that can progress to heat exhaustion and then complete heat stroke, which causes damage to the cell through thermal injury. It affects the liver and the ability for blood to clot — and (animal) patients can die."

Among the warning signs of heat stroke are heavy panting, difficulty breathing, excessive drooling, lethargy, drowsiness, vomiting and potential collapse.

She says people with very high-drive dogs may not even be aware that their pet is being over-exerted as the signs don't show up until the dog stops running.

If a dog is panting and drooling, that will usually stop if the dog is offered a treat, says Jones. Then the owner can move the animal to a cooler, shady area, perhaps wetting its body with water to help it cool down.

If symptoms persist, or worsen, a vet should be called immediately.

PAINFUL PAWS

Jones says you should also consider the effect that temperatures and the sun can



On a summer's day, never leave your pet unattended in a parked car for any length of time. Within minutes, the temperature inside the car can rise to dangerous levels, leading to the animal's death or irreparable damage. (PHOTO: GETTY)

have on surfaces where you might walk your pet.

She says actual thermal injuries to pet paws are not very common on surfaces like concrete but asphalt is more hazardous on a hot summer day. "On asphalt it's just the same (for a pet) as if you were walking on it barefoot. The asphalt can even melt in extreme heat and then actually adhere to the paws and apply continuous heat, so you can get blisters and damage from that."

RISK FACTORS

Dr. Jones says while all breeds of dogs and cats are vulnerable to heat stress, certain breeds or animals with various medical conditions are even more at risk.

She says dogs with long coats can be affected by the heat more easily; so can animals with respiratory problems or those that have had a previous heat-related medical issue.

Like older humans, older dogs are also at greater risk from summer heat — something that could lead to more emergency visits to vets as temperatures climb higher through the summer.

"With elevating temperatures we're definitely moving towards a time where we

could see more (heat-related) cases."

BAKED TO DEATH

Something that still happens way too often is people leaving their pet in a parked vehicle while they run some errands. In 2019, animal protection officers in Saskatoon responded to 194 calls about animals left in vehicles on hot days. This led the Saskatoon SPCA to produce a public awareness video called Hot Dog.

"Contrary to popular opinion, parking in the shade and cracking the window open is not adequate," says Jemma Omidian, the Saskatoon SPCA's manager of animal care and community engagement. "If anything, it just gives people a false sense of security so they think: 'Maybe I can leave them a little bit longer.'"

Omidian says outdoor temperatures even in the 20-degree range can pose a threat to your pet as temperatures inside the vehicle can climb to the high 30's within minutes, and harm the pet — in some cases resulting in death.

"Leave them at home or take them with you on the errands," she says. "There are a lot of pet-friendly places nowadays where you can take your pet inside with you."





Itchy skin is one of the most common symptoms of allergies in dogs. Allergic symptoms can also affect an animal's digestive system. (PHOTO: WCVM/ CHRISTINA WEESE)

Does your **pet** have an **allergy**? Call in the pet detectives

BY PAUL SINKEWICZ

Call it the Mystery of the Distressed Doberman. But it's not a crime thriller. It's the story of a family at wit's end over why their beloved pet is suffering.

Luckily, the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) Veterinary Medical Centre is the perfect place for solving the case. When

a new client comes through Sharon Martin's door, it's time for the sleuthing to begin.

Martin is a registered veterinary technologist (RVT) specializing in dermatology, and she has seen it all. From the Labrador compulsively licking its paws to the standard poodle with unrelenting tummy troubles to the short-

haired tabby with bald patches. They are all signs of distress that hint at underlying allergies.

"I honestly think it's a surprise to a lot of people that pets can be affected by allergies the same way we can," said Martin.

When pet owners end up in her exam room,



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a lot of times allergies are already the suspected culprit.

Seeing your own veterinarian is the first line of defence, she says.

“Go to your own clinic, and a lot of times they can be dealt with there, no problem. We tend to see a lot of the cases that are tougher to treat or aren’t responding to the medications as expected.”

Martin and the WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre team will go through a process of elimination to diagnose the problem. In animals, unfortunately, allergies present the same as a lot of different skin diseases.

“Sometimes it can be diet managed; sometimes with a simple medication. But I would have to say allergies are fairly pricey to diagnose and for treatment as well. It’s very difficult to diagnose exactly what a pet is allergic to,” says Martin.

“Dogs and cats with food and environmental allergies are typically itchy and can scratch, lick and chew excessively,” she says. “This can include paw licking in dogs. Cats can also over-groom when itchy and may remove large portions of hair. Dogs and cats may also develop an odour, have hair loss and recurrent skin and ear infections. Some animals with a

food allergy can also present with recurrent digestive disorders. If your pet is experiencing these signs, it is important to seek veterinary attention as numerous conditions may present similarly.”

Veterinarians can help determine what the underlying cause may be by possibly recommending things such as diet changes or blood work. Unfortunately, Martin says there is no single test that can diagnose allergies.

Blood or saliva tests for food allergies are not accurate in animals. Blood and skin tests cannot be used to diagnose environmental allergies. Therefore, veterinarians will look at the pets’ history in conjunction with their physical exam findings and test results, and will determine the best course to determine if allergies are the cause of the itchiness.

“Allergies are quite common in dogs of all breeds, but certain breeds, such as the German shepherd and French bulldogs, may be more prone to developing signs. Dogs can develop allergies to environmental allergens, such as grasses, weeds or trees, or to food allergens, such as chicken or beef. They can also develop an allergy to fleas, and in many parts of the world this is the most common type of allergy. However, here in Saskatchewan, we don’t tend

to appreciate it as often.”

Martin said there are several treatment options available to help make sure dogs and cats are comfortable and do not suffer from their allergies.

“Some are more challenging than others, but there are always options to treat them — and at least keep the pet more comfortable. It is important to work closely with your veterinarian to determine the best medication for each pet,” says Martin.

“If it’s a food allergy, a lot of the different foods — like vegetables or proteins — can react with each other. There is no great blood or saliva testing available so even if you get those tests done and it says you’re allergic to them, it might be a cross-reaction with something else. So, it’s not very accurate.”

But despite the challenges of her job, Martin is passionate about being a pet allergy detective.

“I really, truly love it. I get to know the animals, I get to know the owners quite well and it’s a very satisfying job. When you see an animal that is so uncomfortably itchy, or missing its fur, and then your treatments start working and they feel and look better, it’s very gratifying.”



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Education is key to successfully introducing a new pet to your household. Dr. Karen Machin, associate professor with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM), recommends puppy and kitten classes, as well as obedience training for dogs. (PHOTOS: WCVM/CHRISTINA WEESE)

Expert *tips* to make a *new* pet feel at home

BY RAY PENNER

Thinking of adding a new pet to your home? Before becoming too fixated on what you'll name it and how much fun it will be, sit back and seriously consider all that's involved. In short, do your research, be prepared, and take your time.

If you're planning on a dog or cat, "You need to consider the age," advises Dr. Karen

Machin, an associate professor at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVM) and a resident in clinical behavior who provides consulting services at the WCVM's Veterinary Medical Centre. She's also the founder of New Hope Dog Rescue in Saskatoon.

"If it's a puppy or kitten, those requirements are going to be different from an adult dog or

cat. If it's an adult dog, it's nice to have a little bit of history — some information about the animal." For dogs, it's good to know about the breed and characteristics, although, as with any pet, each individual is unique.

Machin recommends talking to a veterinarian before you acquire your pet. Discuss your expectations, your lifestyle and



It's Your Doody



personal circumstances. The vet can advise you as to what might be your best options, as well as the typical costs to expect as a pet owner.

If you have children, set up some ground rules. Any pet can be mishandled by well-meaning young children who need to be supervised around the pet at first. Give the pet the time and the space to get to know the children on its own terms.

For puppies, “Ideally, before you bring them home, you’ve given some thought to setting up the environment they’re going to be in,” says Machin. She recommends getting them used to a portable kennel. “Training them into a kennel is always good, because at some point they may need to be transported, or they may need to be in a small, confined area at the vet clinic. For puppies, it’s an excellent thing to do if you can’t watch them. It’s very helpful for house training.”

Machin strongly recommends puppy and kitten classes, as well as obedience training for dogs. “Even if you feel you know all about training a dog, remember that obedience classes are for the dog, not the owner. The dog learns to respond to commands when there are distractions. Puppies learn socialization and not to be afraid of other dogs. If I get a new dog or puppy, I always enroll in a class.”

If you’re thinking of adding a second dog or cat, you need to go slow. For example, two people, each with a dog, may decide to move in together. One of the dogs may see its environment as its territory. The best approach according to Machin is to start with “off-territory” introductions, such as taking a walk together, in parallel but far apart, then slowly getting closer to each other.

The same approach works well when introducing a new puppy. It would be wise to separate the



When selecting a new pet for your family, consider its age and breed. The needs of a puppy or kitten are different from those of an adult dog or cat. (PHOTO: WCVN/ CHRISTINA WEESE)

pup and the older dog with a baby gate, or separating them altogether until it’s time to go for a walk. Here again, the underlying principle is to not force the issue.

Bringing a dog and cat together can be trickier. “It’s easier to introduce a puppy to a cat than an adult dog to a cat,” says Machin. “An older dog may view the cat as prey, although this is not always the case.” Make sure the cat has multiple escape routes to get away from a bothersome puppy, and be sure to give both animals their own special attention, to avoid jealousies.

As for introducing cats to cats, felines can be finicky. If you want to have two cats right from the start, it is best to have cats that are related.

Sometimes, the new family member is the most important of all — a new baby. To a dog, that can mean lots of strange noises and disruptions. Prepare the dog before the new arrival. Machin suggests playing videos of babies crying and making other sounds on YouTube, and getting the dog used to strollers and other baby paraphernalia. Most important of all, when the baby does come home, associate the baby with

the dog’s positive experiences, such as going for walks or getting a treat, and avoid having your baby around during negative experiences such as trimming the dog’s nails.

With all of this in mind, is

it worth it? “When people get an animal, it’s about the relationship and trust that you can develop between two different species,” concludes Machin. “That can be amazing.”

An advertisement for Riverside Resort For Pets. The top section features the logo, which includes a silhouette of a dog and a cat, and the text "RIVERSIDE RESORT For Pets on Vacation". Below this is a green banner with the text "Boarding * Daycare * Grooming". The middle section has a white background with a faint image of a dog and text that reads "Your Pets next Vacation Spot!! Book your accommodations NOW by calling: (306) 665-7387 (PETS)". The bottom section has a green background with white text that reads "Doggie Daycare Daily Rates & Convenient Daycare Packages to save you money! (306) 665-7387 or BookNow@RiversideResortForPets.ca Location can be found on our website www.RiversideResortForPets.ca".



How can we **solve** Saskatoon's **feline** catastrophe?

BY ELIZABETH IRELAND

Saskatoon's stray and feral cat population has reached catastrophic numbers — it's one of the highest rates per capita in the country. Fortunately, there are programs in place to try to curb the number of homeless cats roaming the streets in our city.

According to the City of Saskatoon, an unaltered female cat can produce three litters a year with average litter sizes ranging from four to six kittens. This means that a single, unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce more than 400,000 cats in their lifetimes.

For this reason, each pet owner needs to take personal responsibility for spaying or neutering their cats and not letting them outside to roam without wearing a leash or halter.

A stray cat is any cat that is found outdoors, whether it has an owner or not. Feral cats are those cats that have reached six weeks of age without human contact; they are scared of humans and often only come out at night.

Maddie Fast is a community cat advocate and a volunteer with SCAT Street Cat Rescue. She currently has two cats of her own and is fostering one cat. She hosts an Instagram account featuring the cats she is fostering @TheStoonFosterRoom. SCAT Street Cat Rescue has many cats up for adoption, including kittens, adult cats aged one to seven, and mature cats over seven years old.

"It's difficult to tell exactly how many feral cats are in our community because these cats are street savvy and don't want to be seen by humans. They tend to live in more established city neighbourhoods in fixed colonies. If a cat is friendly, letting itself be seen and touched by humans, it usually has an owner or has been abandoned," says Fast.

When COVID-19 hit three years ago, there was a sharp uptick in pet adoptions in North America. Unfortunately, not all new pet owners thought through the long-term commitment involved in owning a pet. Fast estimates that about half of the calls that SCAT Street Cat Rescue now gets are from owners surrendering their own cats.

Fast notes that our current culture puts an emphasis on disposable possessions, like how we replace our cell phones every two years. Sadly, this can include cats and

especially kittens.

Due to the fact that female cats are fertile at an early age (often before six months), their gestation times are short and cats can live for up to two decades, it does not take long for a feline population to get out of control. The best way people can help stop Saskatoon's overpopulation problem is to make sure that all cats in their care are spayed or neutered by six months of age to prevent more litters.

A program in place to deal with preventing the issue of stray and abandoned cats is Saskatoon's Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program (SSNP). It is a collaborative initiative of the City of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Academy of Veterinary Practitioners. The program provides lower-income pet owners with access to significantly discounted spay and neuter veterinary services.

SCAT Street Cat Rescue is a registered charitable organization that focuses on promoting quality of care and quality of life for stray cats through fostering, adoption and other programs. Saskatoon's long winters make survival and quality of life difficult for stray cats. The volunteer-based organization gives priority to the most vulnerable felines — including pregnant cats, kittens and cats with injuries or medical problems that require urgent veterinary care.



A single, unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce more than 400,000 cats in their lifetimes. To reduce the number of homeless cats in Saskatoon, pet owners are urged to spay or neuter their cats. (PHOTOS: CITY OF SASKATOON)

Current criteria for adopting a pet from SCAT Street Cat Rescue include keeping your cat indoors only, except when the cat is on a halter or leash, not declawing the cat, and spaying and neutering at the appropriate age (if the procedure has not been done before adoption).

Information about SCAT Street Cat Rescue, and cats available for adoption, can be found at streetcat.ca. More information about Saskatoon's Subsidized Spay & Neuter Program (SSNP) can be found at saskatoon.ca/ssnp.



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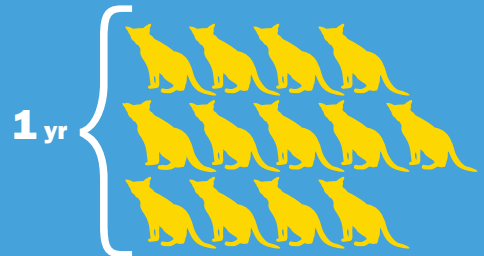


It's important to spay or neuter your cat.

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An unaltered female cat can produce **THREE LITTERS PER YEAR** with average litter sizes ranging from **FOUR TO SIX KITTENS**



A single, unspayed female cat and her offspring can produce **more than 400,000** cats in their lifetimes



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Grab your *leash*, get out and get active!

BY PAUL SINKEWICZ

Not everyone loves a stairclimber. Boring! And lifting weights in a gym is an acquired taste.

But getting in shape doesn't have to be a deadly dull chore. It can involve fresh air and sunshine. Best of all, it can be done with your furry friend.

We are talking about activities for owner and pet alike: walks in an off-leash dog park, or games like agility, herding and K9 frisbee that offer a community of other participants and competitions.

AGILITY TRAINING

Lois Mierau of Sondog Agility loves to get out with her dog for many reasons.

"Agility is the most fun you can have with your dog," she says. "It is a wonderful way to bond and build a stronger relationship with your dog. It teaches the handler how to communicate with their dog through body language, which is how dogs communicate with each other. The dogs love it when we are able to communicate with them through body language. Being able to read our dog's body language is also very helpful in our everyday life living with dogs."

Owning a dog is both a joy and a responsibility. All dog owners know the guilty feeling of not giving enough exercise to their beloved pooch. By participating in a canine sport, both owner and pet benefit from activity — which both need to stay healthy.

"It is good physical exercise for the dog, and the handler, but more importantly, it is great mental stimulation for the dog," Mierau says. "Dogs are more tired from mental stimulation than they are from physical exercise."

Mierau says any breed of dog can do agility as long as they are physically fit and not overweight.

"I have had every breed and cross in my classes from chihuahuas to wolfhounds. Obviously there are some limitations for the larger breeds such as going through tunnels and the narrow dogwalk. The herding breeds such as border collies, shelties and Australian shepherds tend to excel because



Saskatoon Disc Dogs is growing the sport of K9 Frisbee, with its popular Toss and Fetch league and UpDog competitions. (PHOTO: SASKATOON DISC DOGS)



Agility training is a great way to strengthen the bond between a dog and its owner, says Lois Mierau of Sondog Agility. The sport provides physical exercise and mental stimulation for the dogs. (PHOTO: SONDOG AGILITY)

they are bred to work for long periods of time and to work with their handlers."

She recommends investing some time in

obedience training before undertaking a canine sport.

"Obedience training is also very helpful

in agility. It doesn't have to be a formal class, although that never hurts, but the dog has to be able to respond to the handler's cues such as coming when it's called after their turn is finished."

There are many opportunities for competition once the dog is trained. If anyone just wants to build that bond and have fun with their dog and not compete, that's okay too.

"Herding is the new upcoming sport for those with herding breeds. It's great for city dogs to be able to use their instincts, and again, this is very mentally stimulating and rewarding for the dog," she says.

"If anyone is interested in getting started in agility, I recommend they watch a class to see if it is something they would enjoy. All of the dogs love it. Or just give us a call to register for a class. We offer all levels of agility training as well as herding clinics and lessons."

OFF-LEASH FUN

Of course, just taking your dog out for a walk in one of the city's 11 off-leash parks is always an option for those with a mind for a casual stroll.

From fenced-off plots right in the city, to riverbank forests, Saskatoon offers a variety of off-leash parks. By letting your dog off the leash to have a sniff, you are giving them the mental stimulation they need for a happy life.

The City of Saskatoon also provides waste bags and garbage receptacles at its off-leash parks, making a walk with your pet one of the easiest ways to get the exercise you both need.

Check out the amazing variety of Saskatoon's off-leash dog parks at saskatoon.ca/dogparks.

K-9 FRISBEE

Two growing canine sports in Saskatoon involve high speeds and majestic leaps.

Saskatoon Disc Dogs is a club offering the chance to participate in two types of K9



The City of Saskatoon offers an amazing variety of dog park experiences, from urban neighbourhood parks to riverbank forests. (PHOTO: CITY OF SASKATOON)

Frisbee.

Organizer Kris Atchison says the Toss & Fetch league has been around since 2018 in the city and has grown to about 30 teams. It's a chance to rack up points in world-wide league.

"It's a basic retrieving game where the dogs earn points depending on how far their catch is," Atchison said. "There are five catch zones worth from 0 to 5 points. The dogs get an extra half-point if they catch with all four feet off the ground. It is an easy way for people to become involved with disc sports."

The other disc-related sport is called UpDog. UpDog is also a worldwide organization. It involves a number of games that have different rules and is played on a grid.

"Saskatoon Disc Dogs had five human and 13 dog representatives at the first Canadian UpDog Nationals last year in Calgary where we competed against over 200 other teams," Atchison said.

Getting involved with disc sports is fairly easy, she added. The most important thing is to have dog-safe discs. In addition to online instruction, the Club offers clinics through the year and ongoing support to all members that play Toss & Fetch or UpDog.

"We do have a variety of discs for people to try out to find the right match for human and dog,

Dog-safe discs are produced in a very pliable plastic that will not crack or break. Please, do not throw golf discs or hard plastic discs that crack and break into sharp pieces."

Toss & Fetch seasons start at multiple times throughout the summer. Information regarding clinics, Toss & Fetch seasons and UpDog trials can be found on the Saskatoon Disc Dog

Facebook page.

"Disc is fabulous for being able to participate at whatever level a team is at, from puppies to old dogs. And everyone is welcome," said Atchison.

"While it's not an incredibly active dog sport for humans, getting out to play with your dog has tremendous mental benefits as well as just being outside and moving."

Ever wonder how pets and humans benefit each other?

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UNIVERSITY OF SASKATOON

The **cat** came back, thanks to **microchipping**

BY JENNIFER JACOBY-SMITH

It's no secret that our pets become beloved members of the family. That's why when one goes missing it is so heartbreaking and emotional for everyone involved.

Nikky Barks and her family adopted Walter White in 2016. Named for the famed character in the television show *Breaking Bad*, the grey-haired kitten had found his forever home.

But in 2019, Walter White bolted. In the midst of a family move, the cat made a break for it. In unfamiliar territory, it seemed the cat couldn't find his way home. Despite desperate search efforts, Walter White was nowhere to be found. The family was devastated.

Fast forward three years to October, 2022. A woman spotted a grey feline hanging around her yard. Worried for its wellbeing, she brought it to the SPCA. Staff found a microchip and were able to notify a stunned Barks that Walter White had finally been located.

According to SPCA staff when Barks got the call that Walter White had been found, she was so excited she immediately raced to pick him up. The tearful reunion had everyone emotional. Walter White was happy to have all the attention.

The happy family reunion was made possible by a simple microchip.

Microchipping your pet is easy and painless. You can take your cat or dog to any vet clinic, and they can do the procedure there. A needle injects the microchip under the skin between the shoulder blades. Out of convenience, many pet owners opt to do it at the same time as spay or neuter surgery.

"We recommend that every pet be spayed or neutered so it's easy to do both at the same time," says Jemma Omidian, manager of animal care and community engagement with the Saskatoon SPCA.



Thanks to his microchip, Walter White was reunited with his owner Nikky Barks at the Saskatoon SPCA. The cat had run away over three years ago and was unable to find his way home. (PHOTO: SASKATOON SPCA/ FACEBOOK)

The microchip can also be linked to your pet license which means your dog or cat can come home even faster if they ever wander off. Officers with the Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA) have the ability to scan an animal if it is picked up while at large. If the microchip is tied to the license, officers can return the animal home. Also, anyone encountering a stray can take the animal to a vet clinic or the SPCA to be scanned for a microchip.

If your animal is microchipped and it is connected to a valid pet license, there is an exception that a license tag doesn't have to be attached whenever the cat or dog is off the premises of its owner.

"(Microchipping) is a permanent way to have that identification on them," says Omidian. The microchip can't fall off or be removed. Breakaway collars are safer, but they can mean your animal can

inadvertently lose its identification.

Omidian recommends both physical identification tags on a collar and microchipping, as the tags are a visual indication of ownership and sometimes make it quicker to track down contact information.

As for the Walter White case, it highlights the benefits of microchipping and the diligence of the owner to keep her contact information up to date.

"It's not only important to get the microchip but also to keep that information up to date. So if you're moving or if you change your phone number, you want to make sure the chip is correct with the right information for us to reach out," says Omidian.

Walter White is back being doted on by Barks and her family. For more information about microchipping your pet, talk with your veterinarian.



Cat licenses as low as \$19/year.



It's *difficult* when a pet passes away. Here's *how* to cope.

BY RAY PENNER

Daisy was always there to greet the children after school. She loved those weekends at the lake. When someone was feeling sad, she was a source of comfort, a friend you could always confide in. It was impossible to imagine the family without her. Then, after 14 years since she came into their lives, she took sick and was gone.

Yes, dogs and humans are not the same, and in some very important ways should never be regarded as the same. But grief, and how you deal with it, can be deeply felt regardless. Someone who has devoted her extensive career to grief counselling related to both humans and animals is Judith Blythe, BSW, MSW, a clinical social worker and pet loss support counsellor with the VCA Canada Western Veterinary Specialist and Emergency Centre in Calgary.

As a professional counsellor, Blythe has learned that, while attending grief support groups can be very good in the case of human loss, this approach does not generally work as well for those who lose a pet. "You might want to attend one session, but it seems a better option is talking with friends or a grief counsellor," says Blythe.

"One thing I recommend highly — and my people tell me it's one of the best things you can do — is to write a letter to your pet." She stresses "to" and not "about" your pet. Make it as much about your pet as possible, even matching the colour of the paper. Add small photographs and anecdotes. Involve your children, such as having them draw pictures of the pet. "But don't close the letter right away," adds Blythe. "Leave it open-ended for a few days. Then, one day, when you feel ready, sign it."

The next step may come as a surprise. "If you have cremated remains, you can pair up the letter with the remains, but you can do anything you want with the letter, regardless. You can keep it and read it from time to time. You can bury it. You can burn it and scatter the ashes to the wind. The letter seems to help people quite a bit."

Blythe explains how grief is like "a train



Talking to friends or a grief counsellor can help when coping with the loss of a family pet.

(PHOTO: GETTY)

going around a mountain in your head. It starts at the top, then goes down to the bottom, then up again, repeatedly. Our fear is that we're going to forget, so writing the letter is like a one-way track. It lets the train go down your arm and onto the page, where you can let it go."

Although we don't like to contemplate loss of life, we cannot ignore it. It's far better to make rational decisions before they need to be made. Those decisions can be tough. Blythe can cite cases where people have spent forty thousand dollars and more to prolong the life of a dog with cancer, with little chance of the animal surviving for much longer. What would you or your family do when faced with your pet's serious prognosis, when the only alternative is euthanasia?

"I do not see euthanasia as a bad thing," adds Blythe. "I think it is the ultimate kindness, when pets are extremely ill and suffering, to let them go. Keeping your pet alive when it is suffering can be more for you than the pet."

Blythe advises against immediately getting a replacement for the pet you lost. "I think you need to adapt to the loss, because it could be difficult to bond with that new dog."

FINAL ARRANGEMENTS

When your pet does pass away, you have basically three options, according to Brook Olson, manager of Passing Paws, the only pet aquamation service in Saskatchewan and the first in Canada.

Pets can be buried on a farm or acreage. However, "It's illegal to bury pets in the city," says Olson, "but you can bury or scatter their ashes on your property." The ashes can come from either cremation or aquamation, a process which is more environmentally friendly, as explained on the Passing Paws website.

Olson also points out the many ways people like to memorialize their pet. "Lots of people do planting of trees or gardens, but some even get a tattoo of their pet's paw print"

Animal Control

The Saskatoon Animal Control Agency (SACA) is responsible for the enforcement of the Animal Control Bylaw and the Dangerous Animal Bylaw and is contracted by the City of Saskatoon to provide animal control services including:

- Reporting of animals at large
- Reporting barking and howling
- Reporting dog bites
- Complaints regarding defecation
- Reporting of dangerous animals

SACA Hotline: 306-385-7387 (available 24/7)



Responsible Pet Ownership

Make sure your pet is a positive addition to the community

- Keep them licensed – All dogs and cats (indoor and outdoor) over four months require a valid license.
- Keep them from roaming – All pets must be on-leash (no longer than 2m in length) when off private property.
- Scoop the Poop – Owners must clean up after their pets.

Be considerate and courteous to other people and children enjoying the outdoors and keep in mind that not everyone is comfortable around pets, even friendly ones.

