

# Paws for a cause: Pets and people hit the pavement for fundraiser

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Salem - On a picture-perfect Sunday morning, with tails wagging and owners in tow, an estimated 100 excited canines embarked on a 1.3-mile walk around Salem Willows to raise funds for Salem's Northeast Animal Shelter.

The first-ever Paws in the Park fundraiser, held May 31, was the brainchild of Natasha Bansfield, a shelter volunteer and owner of newly created Natasha Bansfield Events of Peabody.

"I wanted to have a grand opening event that would introduce my business to the community," explains Bansfield. "Then it occurred to me, why not have an event that showcases my talent while raising money for a cause that I care so much about?"

Bansfield approached Northeast Animal Shelter's development director, Laurie McCannon, and with the support of Randi Cohen, the shelter's executive director, Paws in the Park was born.

"This is a fun project that brings families and dogs together," said Bansfield.

The atmosphere was festive as walkers gathered to begin the route that would take them twice around the park. Friends and families laughed and took pictures as their dogs strained on their leashes in anticipation. Although pre-registration had been encouraged, nearly three times the estimated number of walkers arrived at the event due, in part, to the beautiful spring weather. For a \$20 registration fee, pet owners received a T-shirt and bandana, a photograph of themselves with their dog, a goody bag filled with dog treats and information, and a fun-filled morning of activities.

Along with raffles, a silent auction, and a sale table covered with pet items, Alley Oop the Clown entertained the children with magic and balloon creations. In addition, Petco of Peabody offered a free basic training class and, for a nominal fee, licensed veterinary technicians from New England Veterinary Clinic were on hand to inject tracking microchips into the animals of those pet owners who requested them.

The event was a community effort in the truest sense of the word. Paws in the Park was organized and staffed entirely by volunteers, and it was funded by donations from local businesses. Fifteen volunteers provided support for the fundraiser, both in the planning stages and on the day of the event. Several of the volunteers were new business owners, who, like Bansfield, donated their time and talents providing services in the areas of graphic design, silk screen printing, photography and dog training, among others.

More than 35 local businesses donated silent auction items and money, including Danversbank, which funded the purchase of the microchips that were available for purchase on the day of the event. As a result, 100 percent of the proceeds raised went directly to the Northeast Animal Shelter.

The Northeast Animal Shelter is one of New England's largest no-kill, nonprofit shelters and will never destroy any pets entrusted to its care. Since 1976 the shelter has placed almost 100,000 dogs and cats in loving homes. The shelter receives no local, state or federal funding and is entirely dependent on contributions for its annual operating budget. Safe shelter, healthcare, low cost spaying or neutering, and even toys for the rescue animals, are made possible solely by private donations and volunteer efforts.

Several of the walkers on Sunday were also volunteers, and many of the animals who took part in the event were adoptees from the shelter. Pet lovers came from towns as near as Lynn and Peabody and as far as Amesbury and North Andover to show their support. An estimated \$3,000 was raised, far exceeding the program's fundraising goal. Prior to the event, participants had been encouraged to collect additional sponsorship donations, and a gift certificate was awarded to Suzanna Brennan, who raised the most money.

Based on the success of the day, Bansfield is planning to make this an annual event. Looking ahead, she is hoping to have different levels of corporate sponsorship.

*Volunteers who donated their services were: Event planning by Natasha Bansfield Events (natashabansfield.com). Pet photos by Angie Rahilly Photography (angierahillyphotography.com). Invitations and thank you cards by BeeCustom Designs (beecustom.blogspot.com). Paws in the Park logo by Top-Floor Design Group (top-floor-design.com). Entertainment by Alley Oop the Clown (alleyoopthec clown.com). Microchipping by New England Veterinary Clinic (vetcor.com/salemma). Tee shirts and bandanas by Axis Promotions (axispromo.com).*

*For more information about the Northeast Animal Shelter, including upcoming fundraising events, visit their web site at [northeastanimalshelter.org](http://northeastanimalshelter.org).*

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