

Dogs dress up for opening of leash-free park

Costume party part of Peekskill's debut for long-sought site

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PEEKSKILL — It was a very big day for local dogs, and not just because some were trotting around in Halloween costumes as a bumblebee, a small dragon and a couple of pumpkins.

Saturday was a combination costume party and opening day ceremony at the Peekskill Dog Park — a patch of turf in Tompkins Park where dogs are allowed to run around without leashes.

The enclosed spot was opened to the public after a 16-month effort by a group of volunteers and city officials.

Peekskill Mayor Mary Foster did the honors by “unbuckling” a giant leash at the gates of the chain-link enclosure.

“The whole idea is to make this a social space,” said Michael Sellers, who revived the idea of a long-sought dog park.

He moved up three years ago from Manhattan, where his dog Maggie had frequented a dog park in Hell's Kitchen. Sellers said dogs can become aggressive if they don't have a place to play with others.

In Peekskill, some dog owners had been furtively letting their dogs run off the leash in Depew Park.

“It was always with the fear that the dog officer was going to come up there, which he did,” Sellers said. “Nice guy. Really is. But he would mind you, and if he got you twice, you got a ticket.”

The dog officer, Wendell Bowman, said he was happy to have an alternative for leash-free dogs and their owners.

“I had to explain to them there is no place in the city that allows that,” said Bowman, who has 12 years on the job. “We finally had somebody that was nice enough and smart enough to put it all together himself. And they did a great job, and now they have a place to go.”

The city provided the land and about \$10,000 in development fees toward the cost of the chain-link fence, which



Photos by Tania Savayan/The Journal News

Kyly, a 4-year-old golden retriever, came as a nun with owner Angela Male to the opening Saturday of the Peekskill Dog Park at Tompkins Park. The park, which resulted from a partnership between the City of Peekskill and the Peekskill Dog Park volunteer group, has been in the making for 16 months. The opening included a costume contest.



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surrounds the dog park and divides it into two sections for large and small dogs.

The park advisory board recommended the site, an overgrown area off Main Street where a service road used to be.

“I think they did a really nice job, and I love that they had the Halloween parade here,” said Suzan Fischer, who brought her 3-year-old boxer, Ruby. The dog was dressed as a boxer — in boxing shorts and gloves — and won a prize for the costume.

The opening fell on Halloween because of construction delays, and the event proved popular even in the rain.

Dog park volunteers plan to keep raising money for events and add “agility equipment” for the dogs to play on.

“It's going to be redeveloped at some point in the future,” Sellers said of the area, “but for now it's just for the dogs.”



Peekskill Mayor Mary Foster, left, unbuckles the giant leash to officially open Peekskill Dog Park on Saturday at Tompkins Park.