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Va. Beach event encourages adoption of pets

VIRGINIA BEACH

Socks, a 2-year-old shepherd mix, donned a multi-colored bandanna and put on his best show at Red Wing Park this weekend.

He chased a tennis ball, gave out free kisses and greeted everyone who passed by in the hopes of sniffing out a new family to take him home.

Socks, named for his white paws, was one of roughly 40 dogs, cats and snakes that looked for new homes during Woofstock on Saturday. The event, formerly called Pet Palooza, aimed to encourage adoption of homeless animals.

“Our ultimate goal is to find lifelong homes for all of the adoptable guys in our shelter,” said Juleen Ballance, Animal Control shelter supervisor.

Seven animal rescue organizations participated, including the Virginia Beach SPCA, Friends of Virginia Beach Animal Control, Animal Rescue of Tidewater and Virginians Interested in Protecting Every Reptile Inc., or VIIPER. Altogether, they have more than 600 animals in need of homes.

“The need is so great,” said Gay Latimer, who helped organize the event. “All of the rescue groups are overwhelmed.”

Among those who shopped for new owners Saturday was Chico, a scraggly terrier mix; Sam, a slightly overweight Siamese mix; and two shiny, black rat snakes. Zeus, a 13-foot albino Burmese python, acted as ambassador for his snake friends in need of adoption.

It can be particularly difficult to find homes for reptiles, said Marcus Stevens, vice president of VIIPER.

“They get a lot of negative publicity,” he said. “We just want to educate the public and provide good homes.”

Some snakes, like the two black rat snakes up for adoption today, are good pets for owners without a lot of reptile expertise, Stevens said. But larger snakes, like Zeus, who weighs in at roughly 75 pounds, require more-experienced owners, he said.

The event also included \$5 rabies vaccinations, dog licenses and live music. The Woofstock theme was inspired by the 1969 Woodstock music festival, Latimer said.

“Instead of a love fest, it will be a love fest for dogs,” she said, adding that Woofstock will be an

annual event.

The recession has contributed to the large number of homeless pets, Ballance said.

“With the economy, we’ve seen a lot more people surrendering their animals to us,” she said.

Some of the rescue groups said they will work with pet owners to help them keep their animals, even if they’re struggling financially. For example, Animal Rescue of Tidewater will help with food or offer a foster home for pets whose owners are deployed overseas with the military, said Mindy Blevins, the group’s treasurer. The SPCA has a program called Help Out Pets Everywhere, or HOPE, that offers food, veterinary services and other help for financially-strapped pet owners, said Teresa Lamarche, the SPCA’s outreach director.

“It’s unfortunate people are in the situation that they’re in and it’s even more unfortunate if they have to give their animal up,” Lamarche said. “So we try to help them keep the animal.”

Socks hadn’t found a new home by 4 p.m. today, but volunteer Melissa Nagy remained hopeful.

“He just loves everyone,” she said. “He’s so sweet.”

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For information on animal adoption:

Virginia Beach Animal Control – (757) -385-4444

Rainbow Animal Rescue Inc. – www.rainbowanimalrescue.net [1] or (757) 583-8777

Virginia German Shepherd Rescue – www.shepherdrescue.org [2] or (703) 435-2840

National Greyhound Adoption Program, Virginia Affiliate – www.viriniagreyhounds.com [3] or (757) 486-7956

For adoption information or help keeping your pet:

Virginia Beach SPCA – www.vbspca.com [4] or (757) 427-0070

Animal Rescue of Tidewater – www.artanimals.org [5] or (757) 456-1354

For information on reptile removal, re-homing or adoption:

Virginians Interested in Protecting Every Reptile Inc. - www.viiper.us [6]

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Links:

[1] <http://www.rainbowanimalrescue.net>

[2] <http://www.shepherdrescue.org>

[3] <http://www.viriniagreyhounds.com>

[4] <http://www.vbspca.com>

[5] <http://www.artanimals.org>

[6] <http://www.viiper.us>