

YUKON NEWS

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Whitehorse dogs try their paws at flyball

By Tom Patrick

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Mike Thomas/Yukon News



Ginny leaps from a spring-loaded box after releasing the ball from it during the flyball workshop organized by the Yukon K9 Performance Group at Hidden Valley Elementary School over the weekend.

Not unlike a parent enrolling their child in a new sport, members of the Yukon K9 Performance Group introduced their canine companions to a sport called flyball over the weekend at Hidden Valley School.

Three instructors from Anchorage's Alaska Dogs Gone Wild club held the workshop that saw 17 handlers and 21 dogs take part. The workshop could be the seed that will grow into local handlers forming competitive teams.

"We got very positive comments from the participants," said Diane Lister of the Yukon K9 Performance Group. "The general consensus was that a lot of people are interested in training their dogs and starting a flyball program in the Whitehorse area."

Flyball was invented in southern California in 1967. It evolved out of an event called scent hurdling in which dogs collect weights and complete an obstacle course.

Flyball is a timed, relay race conducted by teams of four dogs. In it, a dog sets off from a start line, jumps over four hurdles, collects a tennis ball from a spring-loaded box that releases the ball when the dog's weight presses on the box's angled pad. The dog then sprints back over the four hurdles with the ball, completing the 102-foot run as the next dog takes off to complete the same course.

"When the dogs get good at it they pass each other quite closely," said Lister. "It was really something to see (the Anchorage dogs) run through it."

The sport is most popular in the United States and Great Britain and is overseen by the North American Flyball Association and the British Flyball Association. There is also an Australian Flyball Association.

The current world record, in which all four dogs on a team completed the course, is 14.69 seconds. The record was set in Utah by a team from Las Vegas, Nevada in September 2011.

"In Britain they have big stadiums – fully-packed arenas with lighting, music and everything," said Lister.

The Yukon K9 Performance Group has constructed four training boxes and sets of hurdles for local dogs to practise on, but they now need a new facility to do so during the winter.

Local dog clubs, including the Yukon K9 Performance Group, and others such as Whitehorse Woofers Dog Club, Yukon Kennel Club and the Canines & Company Dog Obedience School, have received word from the City of Whitehorse that they will not be allowed to use the mezzanine room upstairs in Takhini Arena this winter.

"I think we've been up there for over 12 years and ... we haven't had any direct complaints about us," said Whitehorse Woofers president Jocelyn Laveck. "There were some comments made about the hygienic part of it, in respect to having food in the mezzanine.

"We don't really know."

The dog groups were given formal notice last December and were then granted an extension until April. The Woofers haven't been able to sniff out another suitable location for use this winter.

"We have worked with someone from Parks and Rec to find another spot ... but it's just about impossible," said Laveck. "We need a space that is comparable – it couldn't be any smaller than the mezzanine – and something we can afford. The majority of us are non-profits.

“We’re getting a bit desperate. We have nowhere else to go. If we have to pay commercial rates for a facility that we’re only using a few hours a week in the evenings, we just can’t do it.”

As Laveck puts it, it’s not just a bunch of people playing with their dogs. The groups conduct obedience classes, agility classes, and prepare for dog shows in the location. They used to be allowed to use school gymnasiums, but the Department of Education has since banned dogs from schools.

The Woofers will present their case to Whitehorse city council next week.

“All the clubs have been dealing with this matter of being evicted from the mezzanine because that’s our indoor training facility in the winter time,” said Laveck.

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