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Kids get a take on the responsibility side of having a pet

By **Wayne Risher**

Contact

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After five hours of hands-on training at All About Dogs Day Camp in Olive Branch Saturday, campers Alicia Cuccia and Mary Lee didn't seem too sure they had learned anything new.

"Not really," said Alicia, 7. "Me and Mary know everything about dogs already."

Apparently, it helps to have insider knowledge, like if your mom is a dog trainer (Alicia), or if you and your family show dogs competitively (Mary).

Alicia allowed that she had never seen a dog's heart like the one in a gallon jar of formaldehyde; the organ was riddled with thin, spaghetti-like strands of heartworms.

"The heartworm lesson was kind of exciting," Alicia said.

Her friend, Catherine Carlin, 6, interjected, "It was gross."

All About Dogs, held at Olive Branch Animal Clinic, was the brainchild of Save1Pet, a volunteer-run animal rescue network based in the northeast DeSoto County community.

"It's an educational tool," said group co-founder Denise Novak. "The kids had a great time and they learned some good information. If they can learn young, at home, it's only going to carry forward throughout their lifetime. Maybe when they see a dog that's not being treated well, they'll know what to do."

Save1Pet volunteers provide foster care, primarily for dogs, and organize adoption days. The camp was a fund-raiser.

The camp drew 12 children from 2 to 12, group member and camp facilitator Edee Fuller said.

Highlights included lessons in bathing, grooming and training dogs by Alicia's mom, Julie Cuccia, and Dr. Brandy Ellis' show-and-tell on heartworms, fleas and other nasties.

Ellis, a veterinarian with the host clinic, brought props including the real heart, oversized insect model called "Fanny the Flea," chocolate Lab named Ace and a stethoscope for listening to Ace's heart.

"Has anyone heard of heartworms?" asked Ellis.

Half the kids raised their hands.

"See these little, spaghetti-looking things?" Ellis held the jar to give each child a close-up. "These are heartworms. That's what happens if we don't give our dog a preventative every month. These can grow as long as a ruler."

Five minutes into an explanation of heartworms, fleas and other parasites, Ellis paused.

"I think they're getting bored," she said to an adult volunteer. "Let's let them listen to Ace's heart."

To the kids: "Do y'all want to hear what a normal heart sounds like? If his heart had heartworms, it wouldn't work that well."

Ellis made a believer out of Emily Hicks, 6, who has two dogs at home. "I learned his body can get that bad stuff in it," Emily



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Kids learn all about caring for pets at the All About Dogs day camp in Olive Branch, where "Marble" gets a beauty treatment.

said. "That's scary."

Carolee Carlin said she brought Catherine and son Will to the camp to learn how to care for their dog Reesie, who is the same color as a Reese's Peanut Butter Cup.

Carlin, a volunteer with Save1Pet, said they've had the dog about a year, since "a family moved and left her tied to a tree in the front yard."

She sees education as the key to preventing such acts of ignorance. "I think it is so valuable to start kids young appreciating, respecting and loving animals."

More information about Save1Pet is available on the Internet at www.save1pet.org.

-- Wayne Risher: (662) 996-1421

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