



A TAIL-WAGGIN' GOOD TIME

THE LAGUNA BEACH DOG PARK, THE FIRST SPACE OF ITS KIND IN ORANGE COUNTY, CELEBRATES 30 YEARS THIS FALL.

By ASHLEY RYAN

It's no secret that Laguna Beach is a dog-friendly town. From Naked Dog Bistro's baked treats to services like massage and aura readings for Fido, the local pooch has plenty to keep him or her healthy, happy and entertained.

But the scene wouldn't be what it is without the Laguna Beach Dog Park. Established 30 years ago, on Oct. 17, 1992, this open space was the first in Orange County—as well as one of the earliest in all of Southern California.

The land was purchased by the California Department of Transportation, or Caltrans, as part of an environmental mitigation effort resulting from the widening of Laguna Canyon Road above El Toro Road. Caltrans loaned the site for creation of the dog park

by Laguna Beach officials; an organization called Rescuing Unwanted Furry Friends; a volunteer group that works with the city animal shelter; and GTE Telephone Operations, which originally owned the land.

Later, in 2005, Friends of Laguna Beach Dog Park was formed. Marc Buchan, the current president of the board of directors, says that the group came about to help protect the integrity of the space as well as to serve as an entity that could work with the city on necessary improvements.

Over the last three decades, the park continues to be a haven for Laguna residents to get outdoors, exercise their dogs and enjoy the natural canyon setting. Nestled up next to the hills, the fenced-in park features a sprawling meadow split into two sections,



Above and right: Dogs greet each other at the Laguna Beach Dog Park.

one for big dogs and a smaller one for little furry friends.

"The natural environment of the canyon is one [reason the park has been so popular], and obviously that helps to preserve open space, which is a dwindling commodity in Southern California," Buchan says.

Buchan, who has lived in Laguna Beach for around 20 years, visits the park nearly every evening with his 4-year-old pups, two sisters he was fostering until they stole his heart. Before that, he frequented the park with his previous pet starting in 2003, though he didn't take a seat on the board until 2020.

"It's really a well-used, natural gem in our community and an absolute lifeline for dog owners—especially those with large to medium-sized dogs, because they have the space to play and socialize and get their energy out," Buchan explains.

Larry Lewis and Jean Fallowfield, local residents and dog owners who also frequent the park daily, note that it's a great respite no matter the situation. "It's the best place to go and relax when my dog is not bugging me—and play with my dog when she is—and there's no more beautiful park in all of Southern California," Fallowfield says.

"With Calypso, our border collie, that dog's got to run," Lewis adds. "She can try to chase and herd all the other dogs there."

Another thing the couple loves about the space is how friendly and respectful everyone is, always eager to chitchat and clean up after their pets. And, Lewis says, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was great because everyone kept their distance and he was able to replace his beach and gym workouts with laps around the dog park.



Over the years, the park has changed, of course. But Fallowfield and Lewis, who have been coming to the park for decades, say it has only improved. "Young trees are turning into mature trees, which give wonderful shade," Fallowfield notes. "... It just gets better because the trees get better. And the maintenance is great. You can't do much about dogs tearing up the lawn, but they manage to keep it as good as they can."

In addition, most shady spots have been incorporated through the addition of picnic tables with umbrellas. The space has been enlarged as well, providing even more room for dogs to run and play.

In honor of the 30th anniversary, a special celebration was held Oct. 22 at the dog park, with the Laguna Beach Chamber of Commerce presenting two special certificates to mark the milestone: one for the park itself and one to Friends of Laguna Beach Dog Park. Those in attendance enjoyed



Friends of Laguna Beach Dog Park President Marc Buchan with his rescue dogs

complimentary coffee from local roaster Jedidiah Coffee, limited edition goodie bags and dog park membership deals.

"Members can take advantage of certain discounts and coupons that we work with local businesses to get," Buchan adds. "... We want to be in a symbiotic relationship with local businesses, make them aware of the park [and] give them a large customer base."

Here's to the park's next 30 years and the many dogs who will wander its beautiful space in that time. ■

BOTTOM RIGHT: COURTESY OF FRIENDS OF LAGUNA BEACH DOG PARK; ALL OTHERS: ASHLEY LITTLEFIELD

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