



SOCIETY DOG: PLAYING WITH THE PACK

"Promoting socialization and creating unusually fun events for dogs and their people."

To Bay Woof readers, the Society Dog mission statement sounds like a pretty good formula for happiness – and indeed it is. At any of the group's events, you are sure to meet a lot of very engaged and cheerful humans and canines.

Terri Festa of Los Gatos founded Society Dog® in 1999 by encouraging others to join her on long dog walks through the nearby mountains, followed by quality social time at local coffee shops. As word got out, people started coming from all over the Bay Area to be part of the fun. Terri met Doug Festa when he and his Yellow Lab Shabby showed up for an event. The two were married on Carmel Beach in 2000, with their dogs in attendance.

In 2003, Terri began thinking "outside the doghouse" and expanded Society Dog's walks and socials to include more creative events for dogs and dog lovers, including Canine Christmas Karaoke, Mardi Dogs Paw-ty, and Society Dog "Whine" Tasting.

Terri and Doug also initiated after-dark group walks and weekly "Yappy Hour" gatherings. Society Dog became well-known as a way to meet new friends, and soon restaurants and other dog-friendly establishments were soliciting Society Dog to revisit them. Many businesses that had not previously considered themselves "dog-friendly" changed their rules due to Society Dog's great reputation. To establish a gold standard (or "purple paw") for social dog behavior, Society Dog created a list of dog-friendly restaurant rules to be distributed by local visitor centers. The intended outcome of this PR effort is even more opportunities for social outings with dogs.

Group members now enjoy a dog walk followed by social hour each week in the Willow Glen and Evergreen areas of San Jose, as well as Los Gatos and Santa Cruz. Recently, historic dog walks have been added in places like San Jose and Capitola, where people can enjoy learning local history with their dogs in tow. The group has hosted more than 450 dog walks to date, in addition to 50+ special events. Howling Halloween® is the largest and most well-known, drawing hundreds of people and dogs each year.

The Society Dog Bus, known as "The Lime Green Party Machine," was added in 2005. It brought a new dimension to the growing club, transporting two- and four-legged friends to various Society Dog events, including Carmel and Half Moon Bay beach trips and San Francisco Giants ballgames. The vibrant vehicle does a good job of enticing new members into the group.

Society Dog's membership now stands at about 1,000 people, not to mention their canine companions. The Festas are now expanding by establishing satellite "packs" in surrounding communities, providing them with the virtual and hands-on support they need to cultivate successful groups.

All responsible dog owners over 18 years of age are invited to join Society Dog (children are invited to some events). Basic membership, including regularly scheduled walks, is free. "Pre-Furred" membership is also available. Unaltered dogs are allowed only by special permission.

This energetic community of dogs and people is warm, welcoming, and open to all. Plus, as its mission statement promises, Society Dog offers "unusually fun" opportunities for socializing with our furry friends.

For more information, or to join Society Dog, visit www.societydog.net

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