



**SHOW ME
THE MONEY** \$
BY KATINA ANTONIADES

JIM MICH

Cruising Cockers

Rescue group raises money with floating fundraiser

Oldies But Goodies Cocker Spaniel Rescue, a group serving the Washington, D.C., metro area, has learned one of the secrets to creating a successful fundraiser: Use unique local scenery and activities to draw in participants—and put on an event that encourages them to bring their dogs.

That strategy has helped make the all-volunteer group's "canine cruise" on the scenic Potomac River a success. The second annual boat tour, in August 2008, attracted 80 people and their dogs and netted nearly \$1,400—all without too much effort, says Jim Mich, vice president of operations and co-chair for fundraising.

"We're always looking at how much money we can make versus how many hours volunteers put in," he says. "Sometimes it can be really exorbitant when you look at it, but in this case, it's

pretty easy to do." He calls the event "an efficient moneymaker."

During the initial planning stages, finding a cruise company that accepted four-legged guests wasn't hard to do; the group had heard of one that already offered a weekly tour for dogs and their owners. The company allowed Oldies But Goodies to hold a separate, private event on a weekday evening if it could bring a minimum of 40 guests aboard. "You're typically only going to be able to get [a boat] on a weeknight," says Mich. "They have their busy season on weekends, and usually you're not going to be able to do that, because they can fill the boat up anyway."

The cruise company charges the organization about \$15 per person, and the group sells tickets for the 40-minute tour for \$30 each. Guests must pay in advance, which helps Oldies But Goodies get an accurate head count ahead of time, Mich says.

About 80 people and their dogs filled the top deck of a "canine cruise" in August 2008, an annual fundraiser organized by the Oldies But Goodies Cocker Spaniel Rescue Group. The event, which took place in a tourist boat on the Potomac River, netted nearly \$1,400 for the group.

Each person may bring one or two socialized, well-behaved dogs at no additional cost; retractable leashes are prohibited. "Typically with any of our events like that, we tell people 'no extender leashes,' because the dogs can start running around and get out of control," says Mich.

Many volunteers, attendees, and dogs get a head start on the fun at an Alexandria, Va., bar before the boat ride begins. For the second year in a row, Pat Troy's Ireland's Own was the selected spot for "yappy hour." With a pooch-friendly patio and a special "doggie menu," the bar is a perfect spot for a pre-party.

People enjoy appetizers and drinks at the bar until it's time for the "cocker parade." People and their dogs form a procession down King Street, in the heart of Old Town Alexandria, to the marina where they'll board the boat. Mich hopes to use



the unique parade to capture media attention in the future.

During the cruise, people can munch on snacks and enjoy beer, wine, and soda. And their dogs aren't left out, of course—they can feast on biscuits. The group provides its own refreshments, using donated gift cards to buy them.

Volunteers add their special touch, too. "Last time, a couple of [us] ... decided to kind of be waiters and waitresses—walking around with wine bottles, and bringing people glasses, and we came around and served the dogs Milk Bones," says Mich. "That was sort of an afterthought. Serving the dogs food on the cruise—everyone just got a huge kick out of that."

An advantage of a sightseeing cruise—and such tours can be found in many cities, big and small—is the entertainment provided by the scenery and the guests themselves. "You don't need to do a whole lot of distractions for people ... because the cruise itself is beautiful," says Mich. "You could walk around pretty easily on the boat, and you could recognize each other and mingle, and people could see the person who fostered their dog. There were a lot of nice little reunions going on."

To help attendees remember the experience, volunteers snap Polaroids of people and their pets and place them in dog-themed paper frames. The cruise price includes one photo, but people often can't resist buying more.

The cruise attracts both loyal supporters and new friends, and guests bring all sorts of dogs—not just cocker spaniels. The dogs who make the event special, though, are the cockers—more specifically, Oldies But Goodies alumni.

"One of the good things about an event like this is it gets the volunteers reunited with the dogs that they've [fostered] in the past, and it really helps lift everyone's spirits," says Mich. "When you do a lot of rescue work you can get really downtrodden ... but an event like this really gets people's spirits back up, and people are even more motivated to do work with the group." AS





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