

'Strut Your Mutt' for a Good Cause

Sisters sponsor walk to help fund landmine-sniffing dogs in Afghanistan



Taylor Feld, 12, left, and sister Carly, 9, pictured with their pet dogs Nina, far left, and Chance, are organizing the "Strut Your Mutt" dog show at their school, Glenelg Country School, to raise awareness and funds for Marshall Legacy Institute's canine de-mining corps, which train dogs in locating land mines in country such as Afghanistan. (Kenneth K. Lam, Baltimore Sun / April 27, 2010)

With their family's two dogs serving as inspiration, Taylor and Carly Feld, both students at [Glenelg Country School], came up with a silly solution to the deadly serious [landmine] situation in Afghanistan and 70 other countries around the world.

"Strut Your Mutt," a dog show that's the antithesis of the straight-laced Westminster Kennel Club contest, is being organized by the sisters for Saturday, May 8, as a fun way to raise funds toward putting a mine-detecting dog to work. Hidden landmines killed 5,197 people last year alone, they said, and many others were injured.

"We were sitting on our front porch a few weeks ago, and we felt kind of resentful that we'd never put on the dog show since we had the idea a long time ago," said Taylor, who's in the sixth grade at GCS. "So we decided to follow through this time."

The girls' mutts — Chance, a boxer mix, and Nina, a Chihuahua mix — will take part with their owners.

The fundraiser will mark the school's second effort to support the work of the Marshall Legacy Institute, a Virginia-based nonprofit organization that is "working to eliminate the evils mines inflict upon innocent people, animals and communities," according to its website.

Organizers of the institute's K9 Demining Corps Campaign said they hope to start detecting programs in Vietnam and Angola this year. Dogs are trained to sniff out the scent of explosives in the mines, which are made mostly of plastic and therefore invisible to metal detectors, the website explains.

Two years ago, Shelby Patrick, who is also a sixth-grader at the school, initiated a successful campaign to fund a mine-detecting dog for the institute's Children Against Mines Program, which is nicknamed CHAMPS.

The school managed to raise \$6,000 and the Patrick family funded the difference, said Kimberly McCasland, CHAMPS director. The dog was named Dragon for Glenelg's mascot and sent to work in Afghanistan.

"Glenelg Country School has embraced this program and the students have taken it further to ask what happens to kids who have already been hurt by landmines," McCasland said.

Dragon's assignment was the start of a series of coincidental connections at the school, she said, adding that the students, faculty and families have also raised funds to purchase prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs and other assistance for landmine victims.

When notified where Dragon would be working, school officials asked Afghanistan-born teacher Linar Etemadi if she'd be interested in participating in the project. It turned out the fourth-grade instructor had been hoping for just such an opportunity.

So Etemadi jumped at the chance and after starting the communications project she recently formed the Building Bridges Club, an after-school group that meets on Mondays with the goals of providing humanitarian aid through fundraising, educating others and gaining leadership skills. Shelby and Taylor are both members.

Carly, who works with her mother, Tracy Feld, on Carly's Dog Blog, said she "really wants to get another mine-sniffing dog."

"We are already planning names for our mine-detecting dog — maybe Galileo if it's a boy, or Linar if it's a girl," Taylor said, though Carly added that she prefers Bear.

"And we want to tell everyone who comes to the dog show that now they know they've made a difference in the world," Carly said.