

CANINE FRIENDS PREPARE TO FROLIC AT

Owners and dogs are invited to the Bark Park's ribbon cutting at 5 p.m. on Aug. 29.

By Joyce Owen joyce_owen@link.freedom.com

Organizers of the Bark Park, an off-leash pet park and playground, gathered the morning of Aug. 14 to savor the pleasure as their dogs ran through the lush green grass of the soon-to-open park. The opening of the two-acre Bark Park on J. D. Miller offers four-legged visitors and their owners an unfettered environment, free of the hassles of leash laws and dangers of street traffic. It was what Bark Park founder "Spike" Alfassa hoped for, even though not all the dogs were comfortable leaving their owners. "Some of the dogs didn't get it. Some of them have never had the opportunity to run free. "They will be healthier," she said. For Niki Tudge, owner of Bonifay Canine College and Bark Park sponsor, who lives on 10 acres in Washington County, such a park is not necessary for her dogs but she was grateful to see the dogs testing the new park. "When dogs receive the necessary mental and physical stimulation offered by being in a dog park environment they return home pooped, happy and well behaved. A tired dog is a well behaved dog," she said. The completion of the park has been a long time coming for Alfassa, who worked for more than two years to build the park. She named it Nick's Playground to honor her dog that died 10 years ago. She let him out to run and he never returned.

"I always felt I let him down," Alfassa said.

And though the park's primary purpose was to provide a safe place for dogs to run and play with their owners, there will also be training classes at the park.

On Aug. 14, Tudge and Debi Revell, of Pets Behave, led a dog obedience class for the Bark Park's Board of Directors and a mixed array of canines.

The board members practiced with varying results. Some dogs understood the command, while others were just figuring out the first command, when Revell added another.

But this was just a mock class and the board members had gathered to work out details before the park opens.

Alfassa said they had anticipated more shade in the small dog and puppy area where the obedience training was held and hoped a member might come up with a solution.

"It's going to be interesting to see how the park evolves," Alfassa said.

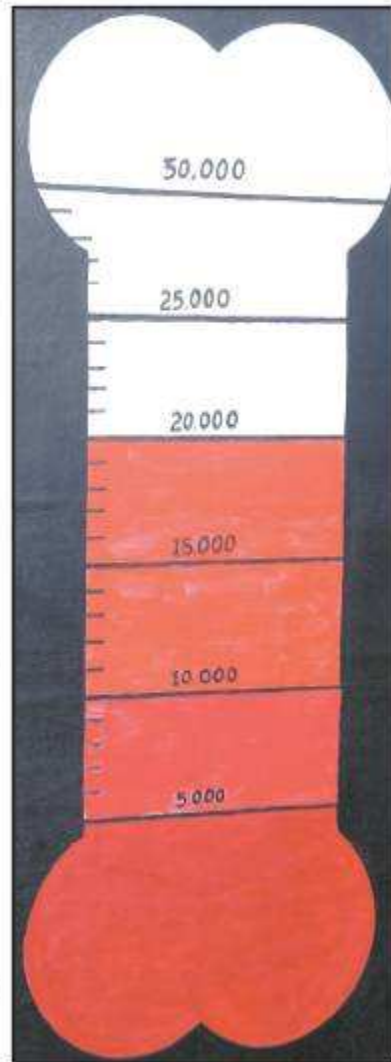
The park, which was designed by Chandra Hartman, also has a separate area for larger dogs.

CONTRIBUTE TO THE BARK PARK

The group has raised \$25,000, but needs an additional \$5,000 to prepare for the opening, which is scheduled for Aug. 29, Bark Park board member Pat Carlyle said. Annual expenses include pest control, water, landscaping and mowing the grass, which will cost \$15,000.

- Top Dog VIP membership -
Donate more than \$100 and receive:
Prestigious membership card
20 percent off all training classes
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- Pals membership - \$60
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10 percent off all park training classes
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5 percent off park training classes
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To complete an application, go to www.barkparkinc.org, e-mail info@barkparkinc.org, contact Spike Alfassa at (850) 267-3936 or Pat Carlyle (850) 585-1146.





Guinness and Dick Weinberg go through an obedience training session Aug. 14 at the Bark Park on J. D. Miller Road in Santa Rosa Beach. (Joyce Owen/The Sun)



Pets Behave's Debi Revell demonstrates the click technique in a dog obedience training class with Lola as owner Chandra Hartman looks on. (Joyce Owen/The Sun)

**ALL PARK MEMBERS
MUST BE CURRENT
WITH THE
FOLLOWING
VACCINATIONS:**

Bordetella – A six-month nasal spray, strongly recommended for all dogs that socialize with other dogs, such as dog parks, day care and boarding facilities.

DHLPP – Vaccine to immunize a dog against distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza and parvovirus.

Rabies – A vaccination administered by a state registered veterinarian.

The current rabies tag must be worn on the dogs collar.