

**EXPRESS YOURSELF**

Call Express! Editor Laura Stuart
at 524-8300, ext. 3326
lstaurot@wjnc.com

**INSIDE**

Wash, dry, create 59
Spring into MOMENTA 58

Express!



Oak Park and River Forest dogs (and their owners) make tracks to Forest Park's dog park, the closest full-time, off-leash park in the area.

A fetching good time

Where local dogs (and their owners) meet to play

**Story and photos by
STEVE SHAY**

A dog seldom walks the Earth beyond a decade and a half, and every dog owner knows it. That might explain why we dog owners cling to them, and to each other. Gathering at parks with other dogs and their owners gives us the chance to cherish our best friends, and make some new human ones as well.

My 5-year-old golden retriever, Alice, is really just a 90-pound, ever-shedding puppy. We love to socialize, and she loves to run, run, run! Alice and I made a new friend, Archie, at

Lindberg Park, on a recent Sunday morning.

The irresistible 3-year-old airedale, a black and rust-colored, curly-haired diplomat, sniffs and greets newcomers like us, while contentedly acknowledging the regulars. Archie's biggest care seems to be deciding who to romp with: those of us with two legs or those with four.

The Park District of Oak Park permits dogs to frolic off-leash at Lindberg Park during a two-hour morning window on weekends. Over

50 dogs converge on a typical Saturday or Sunday. The park is located a block southeast of North and Harlem avenues, on Greenfield Street between Marion Street and Woodbine Avenue, and is unfenced.

Ridgeland Common Park is Oak Park's only other permitted space to run a dog off-leash, on weekend mornings and legal national holidays, and is equally popular. Terriers, poodles, Labs, golden retrievers, beagles and others happily taunt each other

see DOG PARKS on page 60



Lindberg Park is one of two Oak Park parks with limited off-leash hours for dogs. On a typical weekend morning, Lindberg plays host to over 50 dogs and their owners. Below, the author's 5-year-old golden retriever, Alice, takes a break at the Forest Park dog park.

our money on fundraisers there for improvements," she says.

"Dogs have to run or they get goofy. They do what dogs do, then they're cool the rest of the day," adds John, an architect.

A dog park in Oak Park?

There are Oak Park dog owners who've been arguing for years for a permanent dog park in Oak Park. Cameron and Sarah Beatley run their chocolate Lab, Hershey, and their black Lab, Samantha, at Lindberg, but would like another option.

"We've all been arguing for a permanent park. We have a lot of dedicated, open space for children, but not for dogs," asserts Cameron.

"Chicago is very active establishing new dog parks. It's about time that Oak Park got in the game," argues Sarah.

According to Gary Balling, executive director of the Park District of Oak Park, a dog park may be on the horizon. "We've just completed our comprehensive plan, and one of the standards is that our community should have one or two dog parks," says Balling. "We'll develop a master plan, talk to the community, and see if we can find a location. We have a good relationship with dog owners, and want to see it happen."

Balling comments that the cost of a designated dog park will be addressed by passage of the Park District's referendum for funding park renewal and improvements. It comes up for vote on April 5.

"When most people drive past a ballpark they see an open space with grass. I see turf that wears, and needs to be managed. There's a lot of effort that goes into its maintenance. It all costs money," he says.

Stockbroker and long-distance motorcycle enthusiast, David Adler, lived near Lindberg for 25 years. He recently

moved to Aurora, but treats his two dogs, Koto and Bear, to the park twice a month. A founder of oakparkdogs.org, he's been the alpha-dog of the site in its quest to establish one or more dog parks in Oak Park.

"The whole concept of the dog park is that it's dogs that bring us together, and it's the people who keep us together," says Adler, a self-professed "good-ol' farm-boy and doctor's son in my youth."

David and his daughter, Ashley, a college freshman, enjoy the annual chili party thrown by "the Lindberg Park people."

"Lake County issues dog park permits which have been shown to pay all costs associated with the parks," he says. Adler thinks Oak Park dog owners would be willing to purchase permits.

Other issues will have to be addressed before an Oak

see **DOG PARKS** on page 62

Dog parks

continued from page 57

and chase after balls and Frisbees, while their owners clutch coffee cups and mingle.

Archie's owners, Dick and Peg McKinlay, enjoy Lindberg as much as he does. "We exchange Christmas gifts with the others, and have gotten to know our neighbors better, too," says Dick. They take turns with Archie, one walking him a mile in the morning and the other in the afternoon. But often they both accompany Archie to Lindberg.

Bandit, an 80-pound Bernese moutain dog, is another Lindberg regular. "I searched the web and found a breeder in Upstate New York," says his owner, Nate Mellman, a postal service attorney. "He flew in on American [Airlines] in a crate. That was when we first met."

Dr. Anibal Pepper, chief of surgery at West Lake Hospital, enjoys tossing tennis balls to Morgan, his son's 2-year-old white Labrador. "Morgan's my 'grand dog.' My son has a small Manhattan apartment, and Morgan needs more room to run," he notes.

Oak Park resident Kate Dooley treats Bonnie, her year-old collie, to dog parks far afield. "We've been up to Lake County, to the ones on Chicago's lakefront, (there is a dog-friendly beach near Foster Avenue and another at Belmont Avenue), and 'Wiggley Field,' on Sheffield, which is all blacktop. That's a lot of work and driving to get your dog exercise," she says.

Forest Park hangout

Closer to home is the Forest Park dog park, on Circle Avenue just north of the Eisenhower Expressway. It's fenced, has a woodchip surface for sensitive paws, and benches for their owners.

Thanks in part to donations, a permanent doggy water fountain will soon be installed. Some feel that because of its popularity, it gets overcrowded, especially during weekends and at the dinner hour. But everyone seems to appreciate that it's open every day, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

"I like mischievous dogs," says Shalini Johnson, a first-

year resident at Swedish Covenant Hospital.

Johnson named her Rhodesian ridgeback Dobbie, after the elf in *Harry Potter*. Dobbie enjoys mixing it up with the other dogs, and Johnson likes "meeting others with common interests," she says. On weeknights she and her sister take Dobbie to the Forest Park dog park. She also brings her pet to Ridgeland Common if she's not too busy. Otherwise her father does the playful chore.

Oak Parker Carolyn Effgen brings her companion, Louise, a mixed breed, to the Forest Park facility to give her regular exercise. Her take on the Oak Park off-leash hours? "Only two hours on weekend mornings is nuts," she says.

If Louise isn't careful, she might run into Strider, literally. Strider is 160 pounds of Great Dane. He's a "spotted harlequin," and looks like a supersized dalmatian. His owner, Oak Parker Len Milewski also makes use of the Forest Park park.

Oak Park writer Tony Mavrelis avoids Forest Park, preferring Lindberg for his two Rhodesian ridgebacks, Olive, and Breaker. Compared to Lindberg, he finds the Forest Park facility too confining for his dogs.

"We rescued Olive from a puppy mill, where her eye got scratched and infected," he says. (Olive is missing her right eye.) "The Forest Park space gets really enclosed with all the big dogs there. If Olive had her other eye, she'd be a little overwhelmed."

An urgent care doctor, Betsy Hiltcher, also of Oak Park, takes Royko, a vizsla, to Forest Park. "We spend





Dog parks

continued from page 60

Park dog park becomes a reality. "We don't have a lot of open space, and, because of the barking, people are not going to want a dog park too close to their homes," says Balling. "Many of our parks are surrounded by homes."

"When people appear with dogs, vandals disappear," insists Adler. "A hundred years ago, people would meet at the local church or town square. Guess what? Now it's the dog parks."

"I'd kill for a permanent dog park," says Sheila Fingerman, who totes her two young collies, Billy and Julie, to Austin Gardens, near her home. There, of course, dogs must stay on-leash. She and her husband drive their dogs to Ridgeland Common when time allows.

Jennifer Roach, a nursing home admin-

istrator, lives just south of the Eisenhower Expressway. Her chocolate Lab, Junior, craves Ridgeland Common Park. "This is the only place I have to throw him his toys so he can fetch," she says. "My yard isn't big enough." She points out that even on the coldest weekend mornings, Junior has over 40 other pals to play with there.

Other Ridgeland Common Park regulars weigh in on the benefits of mingling for their pets. Lisa Jarvis found Frankie, a beagle/basset hound mix at the Heartland Animal Shelter in Northbrook. "If dogs socialize more, they're less likely to be perceived as mean," says Jarvis. "If they run and play like this they're not going to be barking at home, or attacking people they see on the street."

"Bailey acts different on Saturdays and Sundays," says David Moon, of his Wheaten terrier puppy. "She gets great canine companionship here. It's the highlight of her week."

Dog days

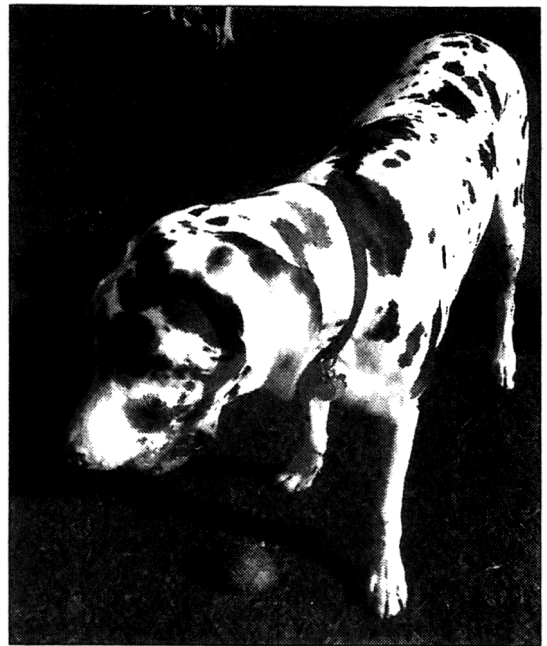
Tentative hours have been set for off-leash dog hours at Lindberg and Ridgeland Common parks, according to the spring Park District of Oak Park brochure. They are:

Lindberg Park:

Dates	Days	Times
March 19 to Nov. 6	Saturdays and Sundays	6:30 to 8:30 a.m.

Ridgeland Common Park:

Dates	Days	Times
March 19 to Aug. 14	Saturdays, Sundays and legal national holidays	6 to 8 a.m.
Aug. 14 to Nov. 6	Saturdays, Sundays and legal national holidays	6:30 to 8:30 a.m.



Big and little dogs mingle peacefully at the Forest Park dog park, top left, but few outweigh Strider, top right, a 160-pound spotted harlequin Great Dane owned by Oak Parker Len Milewski. Above, Lisa Jarvis and Frankie, a beagle/basset hound mix, are regulars at Ridgeland Common Park.