

COMMUNITY

# Canines bring 'a little light' to library patrons

Benicia hosts Cuddle Club, a monthly event of the Humane Society of the North Bay



Webster the dog walks through the Benicia Library as the Humane Society of the North Bay brought dogs to Cuddle Club on Saturday. PHOTOS BY CHRIS RILEY — TIMES-HERALD





Leah Zimmerman, 11, meets Webster as Penny Foote meets Gingersnap during Cuddle Club at the Benicia Library on Saturday.

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**By Janis Mara,**  
**Vallejo Times-Herald**

Calvin and Hobbes, a pair of Chihuahuas, held court in the center of the room, basking in the attention of a group of adults and children at the Benicia Library on Saturday.

The dogs were visiting the library as part of the Cuddle Club, a monthly event of the Humane Society of the North Bay that brings dogs to venues including libraries and senior centers in Vallejo, American Canyon and Benicia.

Penny Foote, 8, of Benicia, tentatively reached out a hand to touch Hobbes, who wagged his tail. Reassured, Penny patted Hobbes' head as her mother Lauren looked

on. The two dogs are almost identical, except that Hobbes is solid brown and Calvin is brown and white, with a comical half-brown, half-white face.

“Calvin and Hobbes are littermates,” said Carlene Coury, a Vallejo resident and former Humane Society advisory board member who founded the Cuddle Club in 2022. The brothers must be adopted as a pair, Coury said.

Cuddle Club gives families an opportunity to come in and meet the dogs, see how the dogs interact with people and maybe decide to adopt, says Jennifer Baker, the library’s director.

Also, “I’ve seen families that would love to adopt but can’t because maybe someone in the family is allergic, so they come in once a month to get their dog fix,” Baker said.

Given that Carly Bryan, 14, of Benicia, has seven dogs, one might not think that she would need such a fix. But she was the first person to arrive at the event Saturday. Not surprisingly, Webster, the first dog to arrive, made a beeline for Carly, who obligingly stroked the mixed-breed dog’s smooth grey and white coat.

Other dogs at the event included another pair of Chihuahuas, Roo and Gingersnaps, though those two aren’t related, and Georgia, an extremely photogenic Siberian husky.

“We bring two types of dogs, current shelter dogs and what we call ambassador dogs,” said Stephanie Vargas, a Cuddle Club volunteer.

“Ambassador dogs — a few of our team members have adopted shelter dogs and know their personalities and know they will be good with lots of people,” Vargas said. Shelter dogs are carefully evaluated to make sure they will interact well with humans before coming to an event, the volunteer said.

Coury founded the Cuddle Club in concert with the Humane Society because she had seen the value of canine companionship to her own mother in her senior years, and began taking dogs to senior centers, assisted living facilities and memory care facilities.

Baker learned about the Cuddle Club and reached out to Coury to suggest offering visits at the library, where the most frequent human participants tend to be parents and children.

The volunteers bring what the Humane Society calls “look books” with photos of the dogs and cats that are up for adoption, “and they can talk to us about going down to the shelter to check them out,” Coury said.

Webster, Gingersnaps, Roo and Calvin and Hobbes are up for adoption, though the afternoon was still young. Cuddle Club events begin at 1 p.m. and run for a couple of hours.

Summing up, Baker said of the event, “Basically it’s an event to provide a little light.”

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