

Yappy Birthday to you

Bow-wow Blow outs are fun for kids too!

By Vera Lawlor

Go ahead sing to your hearts content but in the end it's more likely to be the bone-shaped peanut butter cake that makes your dog howl.

That's the most popular flavor at Bone Giorno's Dog Bakery in Pequannock where bakers fill 15 orders per week for birthday cakes.

Pugs Bridget, 3, and her sister Sophie, 1, lapped up slices of the peanutbutter treat with the help



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of friends from the Bone Giorno small dog playgroup during a recent birthday celebration for

Bridget.

"We had about 15 dogs there - one woman brought six Yorkies," said Heather Smith of Montville, the pugs' "mom." "Of course the dogs don't know what's going on any more than a 1-year-old child knows, but we all had fun."

Husband Don Smith captured the party on film while two-legged kids Laurie, 20, Calvin, 18, and Katie, 14, joined in the festivities.

TWO-LEGGED GUESTS

"What I've noticed since we got these dogs is that they have brought us all closer together," Smith said.

"My teenage children are at that age where they are trying to find themselves and they are doing they are doing more and more things with-

out us. These dogs give us a common bond - we all love them." Throwing a birthday party for Bridget was the icing on the cake so to speak.

"The kids thought it was a very cool thing to do," Smith said.

Bone Giorno charges \$50 to book the party room and an extra \$50 for the servic-

es of a party motivator. The job of this host or hostess is to keep every-



Three springers Russel, Reggie, and Ricky waiting patiently for party guests to arrive. The dogs are owned by Joy Sarnelli who donates any gifts for the dogs to homeless animals.

one safe and to orchestrate games for the dogs and humans.

"The games run the gamut everything from pin the tail on the donkey to musical chairs," said Sandy Lessuck, a Bone Giorno baker who has hosted a number of birthday parties.

Musical chairs, she said, is a favorite for the kids. The youngsters march the dogs around in time to the music and when the music stops they are asked to give the dogs a command such as "sit," or "lay down."

"If the dog won't do it the kid has the option of doing the action," Lessuck said. "They love that."

Bone Giorno caters the party with treats and a birthday cake. Human food is the responsibility of the birthday dog's family. The 15" peanut butter dog cake is \$14.25 and serves 12 to 14 dogs while an individual 5" cake is \$9.50 and feeds one to four dogs. Other popu-

lar flavors include carrot, carob, and banana.

AT-HOME PARTIES

Families who prefer to have the party at home can hire a motivator to work the event.

"Basically we serve as party planners and teach the family how to throw a successful birthday party for a dog," said Donna Alfano, owner of the bakery and a pro at these four-legged affairs. Her yellow Labradors Baci, 6, and Gia, 9, will enjoy a birthday pool party in July with 15 of their four-legged friends.

Doggy parties, Alfano said, shouldn't be more than an hour-and-a-half long. After that the dogs might start to get a little cranky. The festivities need to be held in a secure area like a fenced-in yard or the basement. Guests should be made aware of a designated bathroom area and provided with pickup bags upon arrival. "This is important because dogs are always very excitable when they arrive at the party and the first thing they do is poop," Alfano said.

Motivators won't do the actual pickup but will gently remind guests that they are responsible for cleaning up after their dogs. Alfano and her staff also guide children and adults on how to properly socialize dogs by introducing them on a leash first. If everything seems to be going smoothly then the dogs can run

loose.

"Every time you bring dogs into a new group there will be vying to see who is the alpha (top) dog," Alfano said. "It takes a while for them to work that out."

Often dogs will act aggressively in a group out of fear, she said. When that happens, party motivators help owners work it out from the dog's point-of-view. A nervous dog, for example, is best held on leash and should not be forced to participate in games.

One of the biggest mistakes families make when hosting a party for the dog, Alfa no said, is being overly generous with food helpings. Bone Giorno's five-inch cake serves four big dogs or seven small dogs. Breeds like Yorkies or pugs shouldn't be served the same amount of cake as the larger breeds.

"Any new food for your dog needs to be introduced slowly," Alfano said. Birthday cake is no exception to that rule. Bridget and Sophie might have had just a little too much at their party. "They had a bit of a reaction and we had some bathroom issues the next day," Smith said.

Vera Lawlor is The Parent Paper's pet columnist.

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