

# Just One Dollar More

A Day at the 2014 Northeast Ohio Mastiff Picnic

By Debra J. Evangelisto



## *With a Little Help From Friends Across the Rainbow Bridge*

It's September 6th, 2014, and the day is finally here. We arrive at Buckeye Woods Park in Medina, Ohio and unpack the car for what promises to be an exciting day. What's going on with the weather, though?

*It's Picnic Day! I feel like I've been waiting forever, since I learned that I was going to be this year's 'Cover Mastiff', an honor that I was extremely proud of and certainly humbled by. So many of my friends from the Rainbow Bridge have come by to hang out with me and watch over the festivities; sort of like humans gathering to watch a Royal Wedding. This day is all about us- Mastiffs- and our one regret is that we can only attend in spirit, though we would all love to be standing by our humans, you know, to mingle. As things are about to get underway we are all so excited that a few happy tears are escaping!*

**7:00 a.m.** - It's raining. The day starts early as we begin to transform an empty pavilion and field into what will be the 13th Annual Northeast Ohio Mastiff Picnic. We have less than four hours to get this done, but we all know what we're doing. Tents are raised, merchandise is unpacked and displayed on tables, auction items are sorted and catalogued, raffle baskets are checked, checked again, and laid out carefully in the main tent. Food is unpacked, sodas and water are put on ice. We are a team in controlled chaos, which is actually pretty normal for us as we set up. Of course, it's not all work, as we greet friends we haven't seen for awhile, pet and play with the dogs that have already arrived, and put on our new sweatshirts with this year's official logo.

Established in 2002, the Northeast Ohio Mastiff Picnic has now become one of the most exciting Mastiff events of the year! Since the beginning, our driving force and mission has

been to raise money for Mastiff Rescue and to encourage a healthier future for Mastiffs through responsible breeding and funding Mastiff Health Research. Our single goal every year is to raise just one more dollar than the year before. This year, we are donating to six Mastiff Rescue foundations: Great Lakes Mastiff Rescue, Southern States Mastiff Rescue, Mastiff Rescue of Florida, Friends of Rescued Mastiffs, Garden State Mastiff Fanciers, and the Old English Mastiff Trust Foundation. We set donations aside for Mastiff Health Research, and always reserve approximately 20% of each year's total revenue, to help cover our operating expenses and to help out a Mastiff or two that needs immediate help such as life-saving surgery, a transport, or similar emergency. The money from the 2013 picnic allowed us to help a beautiful Mastiff girl named Daphne from Friends of Rescued Mastiffs (FORM) receive much needed Anterior Cruciate Ligament repairs.

*It's starting! Everyone is arriving and they are wearing sweatshirts and hats with MY PICTURE on them! I can't believe how many humans and dogs we see walking around down there, checking out the raffle tables, and buying tickets for the Raffle Basket Auction, the iPad Giveaway, the Mastiff Quilt Giveaway, the 50:50 Raffle. Did I mention that people are buying sweatshirts with my picture on them? I'm famous! Wait ... is that my Mama? I see my Mama! She's walking across the field with her arms loaded with donations. MAMA! I love you, Mama! Can you hear us all barking? I miss her so much that the tears just keep coming.*



**11:00 a.m.** - It's raining harder now but no one really seems to mind though, because the Picnic is about to kick into full





gear. Cheeseburgers and hot dogs start hitting the grill, food tables are packed with the potluck dishes picnic goers were encouraged to bring a dish. Everyone is streaming in past the welcome table, paying their admission and then picking out their spot under the trees, where they set up their tents and pens and crates. Once settled, most go to purchase raffle tickets and begin exploring the huge raffle basket display under the main tent. Every year, the number of baskets increases and this year is no exception. We have over 100 raffle baskets worth thousands of dollars with all items donated by our amazing family of sponsors, who without fail, seem to send just a little more than they did the year before. Sponsors are the most important part of making the picnic a success and without their generosity; we would not be able to do what we do.

*It's starting to get crowded up here, as the word gets out that today is Picnic Day! As the Picnic gets into full swing, we are all straining to catch a glimpse of our humans, watching to make sure they are having a good time. While it is called the "Mastiff" Picnic", we see so much more than Mastiffs down there! The list of all the different breeds we see includes: English Mastiffs, Bullmastiffs, Dogue de Bordeaux, Neopolitan Mastiffs, Cane Corsos, Great Danes, Golden Retrievers, Bulldogs, French Bulldogs, and one little Chinese Crested named Dick. We all think that he thinks he's a Mastiff. We laugh so hard we cry.*

**11:30 a.m.** – It continues to rain steadily, but it's time for the events to start. We have a professional photographer taking family photos near the beautiful pond behind the picnic area; the fog and mist in the air is making for some spectacular photos. The Mastiff Health Clinic, which is sponsored by the staff of the Seville Animal Hospital, is

administering health testing for many of the dogs in attendance; tests include the Cystinuria Marker DNA and CMR/PRA. The Mastiff Club of Northern Ohio is doing official CGC certification testing. The lines are getting deeper at the raffle ticket booth and the merchandise tent. This year, we are also lucky to have a veterinarian in attendance from Veterinary Reproductive Services of Akron, who is talking to breeders about responsible breeding.

The Northeast Ohio Mastiff Picnic, despite its full name, is becoming much more than a local event. For years, we have had attendees drive from surrounding states, but recently, travelers have come from as far away as Massachusetts! In fact, a man representing Southern States Mastiff Rescue, drove all the way from the Southeastern USA when he heard his organization was on the donation list - with his mastiff in a Smart Car! We even have our share of local Mastiff celebrities: Forrest is making his second appearance in two years and Dr. Quincy, a famous therapy dog, is making his first! (continued on pg. 88)





*I watch over my Mama as she goes to buy more raffle tickets for the Mastiff Quilt, beautifully handmade out of old T-shirts from the MCOA National Specialty. It's so pretty and looks so soft; I can just imagine curling up on it and snoozing away the day. All of the humans very much want to win it. I do see quite a few humans who are not wearing my picture on their shirt, and I want to bark down to all of them to hustle over to the merchandise tent and buy one! After all, it is for a great cause, and I happen to be very pretty.*



The Mastiff Picnic would not be possible without the dedicated team of people who have worked together for years to make the event into what it is today. The Mastiff Picnic's Chief Coordinator is the indomitable Kim Fish, whose love of animals, especially Mastiffs, is only outweighed by the size of her heart. The other Board Members, who work year-round with Kim to plan each year's event, are: Monica and Todd Baughman (Merchandise), Webb Boyles (Supplies, Emcee and Auctioneer), Natalie Buck (Raffles and Giveaways) and Deb Evangelisto (Webmaster, Social Media, All Things Technical) – that's me!

We are supported by an ever-growing list of volunteers, people who selflessly donate their time to find sponsors, help stuff baskets, sort and fill out pre-orders for raffle tickets and so much more. Planning for the next Mastiff Picnic starts a few weeks after the last Picnic ends. The date is chosen, post-picnic statistics are gathered and posted, and photos are shared. By the following spring, planning is in full swing, and the most challenging job is in front of us: contacting the sponsors and asking them to once again commit to a donation. Everything helps, and no donation is too small. The website, Facebook and Twitter are constantly updated throughout the planning phases, keeping our fans up to date. In the months leading up to the Picnic, we hold

mini-raffles for a work of art by the 'Artist of the Month' to help us raise money throughout the year and to start getting everyone excited about the upcoming Picnic. Finally, a few days before the Picnic, we are ready. Hundreds of hours of work have gone into planning the Picnic's events, merchandise offerings, logo design, website, raffle items, basket contents, and everything else required to pull off a Picnic bigger and better than the year before.

*We are all so happy! We have been watching and laughing at the Fun Rally and the adorable Costume Parade, where all of the humans made costumes for their kids! We saw some really original stuff, and we are all belly laughing at the cuteness! We are running around, barking and wagging! Can get this day get any better?*

**3:00 p.m.** – The sun is finally out! The sides of the tents have been removed, rain jackets are taken off and excitement begins to rumble throughout the crowd. Such perfect timing as the Great Basket Raffle, the Rescue Art Auction, the iPad, 50:50 and the Quilt Raffles are about to begin!

One hundred fifty-nine adults and forty-six children have been fed! Fifty-five dogs shake out their coats and lay down to dry in the sun, tired from having greeted each person who has walked up to say hello. Lawn chairs are arranged in a semi-circle across the back of the main tent, where everyone collapses, clutching long strips of raffle tickets in their fists, and waiting for the best part of the day to begin! The Picnic ends at 6:00PM and we will need every single second between now and then to give away every single basket, and auction off everything else.

Our emcee takes the microphone and the Great Basket Raffle begins!





*This is just so much fun! Mama actually won a few of the baskets! But even better than that, it seems that every single time a number is called, one or more of us bark or howl or jump up and down in the air as our humans walk away with a basket full of presents! Then we all start barking in congratulations! Did you hear us? Everything gets very quiet now. The last raffle item is about to be taken home by a very lucky human. It's the quilt. I close my eyes, and rest my chin on my paws and notice that all of my friends are doing the same thing! We all hope and hope there is complete silence. The number is called. I know those numbers. "MAMA! Mama, you won! Mama, get up, you won the QUILT! Mama, don't cry, I'm right here! Go get it! I can't believe it ... Best. Day. Ever!"*



**4:45 p.m.** – Finally, the last order of business the auctions, has finally arrived! Every year, four or five original pieces of artwork are auctioned, each one's entire proceeds benefitting a single rescue organization. This money is donated to the rescue organizations before the rest of the Picnic's proceeds are split among the year's beneficiaries. In addition to the Rescue Auction, other items of particular value, including original artwork are auctioned. The bidding is one of the most fun parts of the day. Friends bid against friends, against strangers, each one raising bidding to levels we are stunned by.

This year, there are also extraordinary acts of kindness, as friends bid on and win art for other friends, paintings of individual dogs who have passed on to the Rainbow Bridge are given to their owners. The true meaning of the Mastiff Picnic is seen in the middle of the Auction field. You see, we are not just a bunch of Mastiff lovers who attend the same event every year. We are family.

*Two of my friends come up and sit beside me as we watch their humans embrace on the field. One asks me softly, not really expecting a reply: "Did you see that?" I nod my head slowly and thump my tail once. Justice and Pepper look down together and whisper as one: "Don't cry Mom, we're still here..."*



**6:00 p.m.** – The tables are bare and everything we've worked so hard to gather over the last year is gone! Most of the logo merchandise has been sold, and raffle baskets and auction items are going home with their new owners. There is a line at the merchandise table as people pay their 'tabs' at the end of the day. Volunteers and staff are wearily starting to break down the tables, pack up the trash, and take down what took so long to put up that morning.

We are all a little nervous. How did we do? Once the breakdown is done, we have one last task to do. We sit in the middle table of the Pavilion and break in to groups. We account for cash and checks, the balance of our PayPal account and subtract the money still owed for supplies. We make piles, we count the piles, and then we re-count the piles. We work like a well-oiled machine.

At the end, exhausted and freezing as dark falls on a cold and rainy September evening, we have just enough energy for one more cheer. We've broken the record! We have raised \$22,383.00 to donate to Mastiff Rescue and Health Research.

This is why we do what we do.

*What a day! I watch Mama walk to her car and get up to follow her. Before I leave, though, just one more thing. Being this year's "Cover Mastiff" was such an honor, and I realize that my reign lasts only until the next logo is designed. But, while I have your attention, I'd like to introduce you to the 2015 Northeast Ohio Mastiff Picnic 'Cover Mastiff'...*



*Actually, I will let him introduce himself!*

*"Hello humans. Name's Fish. Buck Fish. You'll be seeing a lot of me next year during the Picnic on everyone's shirt. I think you all know my mom, Kim Fish, so the next time you see her, tell her I love her!"*

*The 2014 Northeast Ohio Mastiff Picnic "Cover Mastiff" and Special Correspondent was:*

*CH Celestial Bella of Mt. Cydonia  
"Bella Durante Geragi"  
February 2, 2003 – December 8, 2013*

