

Canadian Canicross Sports program comes to Shelburne



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You've probably seen runners out for a jog on their own, in pairs and even groups, but what about running with a four-legged companion?

Towne Fitness has partnered with Canadian Canicross Sports to launch a new program to bring the sport of canicross, cross country running with dogs, to the local community. The sport, which has been popular in Europe and Quebec for many years, is about providing both beneficial exercise and bonding for owners and their dogs.

"Anything running related, I kind of jump on, but I think this a very positive experience and opportunity for the community," said Hannah Sine, owner of Towne Fitness. "There's so many people in the community that have dogs and it's a really great way to reinforce physical activity not only with you, but with your animals. It's also a great sport that your whole family can do."

The six-week long program kicked off their second session early Saturday (Oct. 2) morning at Fiddle Park, with around a dozen dogs and owners showing up to take part.

Leading participants through a variety of drills designed to help them run with their dogs was Canadian Canicross Sports founder, Shawn Sobon.

Sobon, an avid runner for almost a decade, told the Free Press he first became interested in canicross after adopting his dog.

"She's the first big dog I've had so I thought it would be great to bring her along running with me," said Sobon. "I saw how our relationship changed, just the bond that we grew together with nonverbal communication. She'll pick up when I'm tired and need to slow down or vice versa and it's just a really neat dynamic. Then the running didn't become about me anymore, but about my dog."

After launching Canadian Canicross Sports earlier this year, Sobon reached out to Sine to partner in creating the six-week long program.

"We're teaching the foundations of the sport and different commands for the dogs like when we want them to run, to speed up, to slow down, and turn left or right. The nice thing about canicross is its structured activity and as much as you're physically

stimulating them, you are mentally stimulating them as well," said Sobon.

Sue Joy, a professional dog walker and trainer, was also present at the Canicross session to help with training the dogs.

"Shawn is more of the running side and I'm more of the dog side of things," said Joy.

As a dog trainer, she noted how dogs have the natural tendency to pull and how canicross allows and encourages them to act on that instinct.

For those thinking of taking up running with their dog, she stressed the importance of warming up.

"Just like humans before we do any exercises you need to warm up your muscles, get everything limber, and blood flowing. If you just let them into their harness and burst out into a run, the potential for injury is there," said Joy.

Shannon Granter and her family took part in the session on Saturday with their two Australian Shepherd puppies, Cali and Jasper.

Granter said they decided to sign up for the session as a way to help train obedience as well as give their five month old puppies some exercise.

"The main one I want to focus on is week four or five, where we're going to walk with distractions and how to avoid distraction on a walk or hike," said Granter.

Kelly Jensen, a professional dog walker, is working on becoming a dog trainer and attended the canicross program with her beagle Kaia and boxer Senna.

"I'm trying to get in better shape and I thought it'd be a really good outlet for the dogs and a good way for me to train myself to run because I'm not a runner," said Jensen.

Jensen added that the program is also a good way to socialize her dogs.

"Although they're really easygoing and friendly, it's still good for them," she said.

With the positive response to the first six-week program, Sine said they're hoping to host events such as hikes and runs together.