

Canicross event provides exercise to both canines and owners



Written By **Brian Lockhart**

It was cold and snowy, but that didn't stop pet lovers and their dogs from participating in the Snowy Paws Canicross event on the trails at the Island Lake Conservation Area on Saturday, Jan. 13.

Dogs of all sizes and their owners went through courses of different lengths and enjoyed a good run that benefited everyone involved with some physical activity.

Canicross is the sport of cross-country running with dogs. Runners use hands-free running equipment with a belt and harness to allow the dog to run in front and pull their owner along behind them.

There are special verbal commands that owners use to guide the dogs. Most dogs understand the new commands pretty quickly and pick up on what the sport is all about.

The event was scheduled for a 9:00 a.m. start for the first 10k race. However, the event was moved back an hour to accommodate people arriving late due to the inclement weather. Once things started, all the races went off without a hitch.

After the 10k race, there were two 5k races.

“The crew at Island Lake did an awesome job,” said organizer Shawn Sobon, founder of Canadian Canicross Sports. “They were out there early clearing the snow. When I arrived at 7:15 a.m., the roads leading into the park were already cleared and the parking lot was clear. There was an outdoor fire pit for spectators to stay warm, and we had the use of a garage to stay warm and register everyone. We had just under 40 people show up. Everybody had a great time. The smallest dog in the event was a miniature Dachshund.”

The harness the dogs wear is similar to what a mushing dog would wear when pulling a sled. Instead, they are pulling people behind them. The idea is to get the dog to pull the owner along the trail.

“It seems to be natural for dogs to want to pull,” Shawn explained. “There is some learning involved. Some dogs have already been

trained to walk along side their owner.?

For most dogs, once they are in the special harness, they seem to get the idea about what is going on.

Some dogs see what others are doing and realize this event is different than going for a regular walk.

Each race was a timed event, with the top three finishers receiving an award.

It was a very competitive atmosphere, with first and second place in the 10k run separated by only four seconds.

The Snowy Paws Canicross event will be making a donation to the Friends of Island Lake to help with projects at the Conservation Area.