

A howling great cause

ArtDogs of Kent fund-raiser to be 'unleashed' next weekend

BY JAIME FERRIS

The dog days of summer will take on new meaning in Kent this year as the Kent Chamber of Commerce unleashes ArtDogs of Kent, a special fund-raiser featuring white bisque dogs—and a few dog houses—decorated by 68 artists and on view at 68 sponsor locations in the quaint town.

The special event lapping up attention in town is to end Oct. 15 when the dogs will be auctioned on e-Bay. The proceeds are to benefit the Kent Chamber of Commerce, The Little Guild of St. Francis in Cornwall and Kent Kats, both of which are nonprofit animal shelter and adoption organizations.

We've all seen the lavish and entertaining "CowParade" cows that have traveled the country, or have heard of the whimsical "Pigs of Brandon," but the town of Kent is taking the concept to howling new heights with ArtDogs, which was imagined by ArtDogs Committee president Jill Zinzi.

"To me, Kent is a true dog-loving town so it was a natural choice for us," Ms. Zinzi said. "Dogs also seemed a much more marketable idea—after all, not everyone has room in their house for a pig or a cow."

"It's been wonderful to see everyone—artists, businesses, the schools—all coming together for this worthy cause," she added.

Ms. Zinzi, a member of the Kent Chamber of Commerce, and of the Retail Round Table, who manages Kent Coffee and Chocolate, said the idea came to her after traveling through Brandon, VT, last summer. There she saw "Pigs of Brandon," an event in which local artists decorated 40 life-sized pigs, with the proceeds from an auction supporting the local artists. Then it occurred to her: "Why not take a bisque dog, have businesses, schools and residences sponsor local artists to have free artistic license to create their own ArtDog of Kent." ArtDogs literature states. Planning started in August 2003 and, next weekend, the dogs are to be "unleashed" for public viewing.

According to ArtDogs of Kent Web site and creative designer Sandra Filippucci, who also created ArtDogs of her own, "It's a magical formula—artists and animals." Some of the dogs have been "muzzled" and will be unveiled to the public for the first time next weekend.

Among the whimsical four-legged friends are Dan Murray's "Bark Twain," Deborah Chabrian and Ed Martinez's take on Van Gogh, "Van Dogh," or the homage to contemporary bucolic landscapes captured in Carroll MacDonald's "Nature Boy," which was sponsored by Lynn Redgrave.

Ms. Zinzi also noted the fun "Disco Dog," created by Crew Designs, which is to be lit with a strobe light while it revolves upon its base, which plays appropriate tunes. There's even a dragon dog—"Rover, Dog of Sirius B" created by Dan Greenbaum and Sheila Cartright—with moveable wings that breathes smoke.

Classes from Housatonic Valley Regional High School in Falls Village produced two dogs, while other creations came from Kent Center School and students at the private Kent School and South Kent School. There is also a jungle-inspired dog entitled "Here, Kitty, Kitty," created by Marvelwood School art department head Marbie Kollath.

"It's been a whirlwind that has kept growing as it went," Ms. Zinzi said. "We immediately exceeded our original expectation. At first we thought about having 40 dogs, but quickly changed it to 50; the final count is 68—[four, built-from-scratch dog houses and 64 ArtDogs]. Everyone has been so enthusiastic."

In addition to the e-Bay auctioning of the dogs and dog houses Oct. 15, a book is to be released in August featuring the ArtDogs and the artists who created them, as well as Kent history.

"It will mostly focus on the ArtDogs of Kent, but also offer a little taste of Kent—it's history, it's vintage buildings, and how it's grown over the years," Ms. Zinzi explained.

Sponsored by Jim and Faye Preston, the book was pho-



Clockwise from above, Deborah Chabrian and Ed Martinez's "Van Dogh," Dan Murray's "Bark Twain," Crew Design's "Disco Dog," Sandra Filippucci's "Sugar Boy" and Danielle Mailer's "Second Skin," which takes residence in John E. Scofield's "Casa di Cane," are among the 64 ArtDogs and four dog houses included in ArtDogs of Kent, a fund-raiser benefiting the Kent Chamber of Commerce, The Little Guild of St. Francis and Kent Kats. The ArtDogs will be "unleashed" to the public next weekend. Photograph: courtesy ArtDogs of Kent; Randy O'Rourke

tographed by Randy O'Rourke, who donated his time and talent to photographing each dog and house.

According to Ms. Zinzi, 40 percent of the auction proceeds are to benefit the Chamber of Commerce for its worthy projects; the other 60 percent, as well as a portion of the book proceeds, will benefit The Little Guild of St. Francis and Kent Kats.

"After I heard the plight of The Little Guild of St. Francis [and Kent Kats], about all of the volunteers working there, and of all of the wonderful work they do to help these animals, there was no question," she said. "They are angels."

The Little Guild of St. Francis is a no-kill shelter located in West Cornwall that takes in stray and abandoned pets from Northwestern Connecticut dog wardens. At the shelter, the animals are groomed, fed and treated by a veterinarian while awaiting adoption. It also presents a number of activities for pet owners throughout the year.

The nonprofit Kent Kats, started by Kent Country Clothes owner Carol Jalbert, is a rescue and placement organization formally affiliated with M.E.O.W. in Litchfield. Its focus is on spaying and neutering.

According to Ms. Jalbert on the ArtDogs Web site, "We still place animals, but we're not a shelter. We've had calls from all over ... from people who want us to take their cats, but we haven't got the facilities. There are always more cats out there, so now we are focusing on trying to alleviate the suffering by helping people to spay and neuter their animals."

"[ArtDogs] was also a way to bring artists together who have never met or who usually wouldn't work together," Ms. Zinzi said. "It also helps the merchants—old and new—who can be found in the nooks and crannies here in Kent by bringing interest back to town. What people don't realize is that Kent is a wonderful walking town; everything is so close by."

The dogs, standing at 26 inches tall, are ceramic, unlike their fiberglass cow and pig friends. They were supplied by Lite'n Ceramics through Zeppa Studios, a ceramic giftware shop owned by artist M.K. Zeppa, whose studio has served as ArtDogs headquarters. Ceramics, organizers felt, was a better base upon which artists could work, offering them a clean, white bisque canvas.

"The artists absolutely loved working on them, many of them straying from what they typically do [artistically]," she said, noting that some artists spon-

sored their own dog. "We told them to go outside the box if they chose, that there were no rules and they could do what they wanted."

Each dog also has its own story. "I did a dog, myself," Ms. Zinzi said. "Truffles, The Chocolate Lab" is a chocolate lab sitting in a box of chocolate truffles. His story is that he is a world-class truffle hunter in France who has discovered the wonderful truffles here. So, he swam across the ocean and dove into the tub of chocolate, the chocolate maker pulling him out by his tail. They only part of him that is furry is his tail, as the rest of him, from the tip of his nose on down is covered in chocolate."

The invitation-only "Unleashing Party" is being held May 29, followed by the public opening of the dogs under one roof May 30 from noon to 4 p.m. at the Kent Community House. On May 31, the dogs and houses are to be moved to their sponsors' homes, where they will remain until the e-Bay auctions Oct. 15. Silent bids are to be taken on the dogs throughout the summer. Bidding for each dog starts at \$400.

On July 3, the ArtDogs are to team up with the Kent Cultural Arts Committee as it launches the annual summer concert season. The day is to include educational and informational animal

presentations from 1 to 4 p.m., as well as fun contests and activities, prior to the concerts featuring Bill Lauf, the Joint Chiefs and Entrain.

"Everyone has been wonderful and supportive from the beginning," Ms. Zinzi said, noting that Ms. Filippucci has been indispensable in planning and design work, and Ms. Zeppa instrumental with her help of ordering and offering her studio space to meet. "Interest is really picking up—we've received calls from The New York Times. The response we've received has been amazing."

"We hope these marvelous mutts will make a lot of money for The Little Guild [of St. Francis and Kent Kats]," Ms. Filippucci added. "It's a magical formula."

Art Dogs of Kent will be on view May 31 through Oct. 15 at various sponsor "houses" in Kent; maps for the walking tour are to be available at Kent Coffee and Chocolate. The dogs will be auctioned on e-Bay to benefit The Little Guild of St. Francis and Kent Kats animal shelters and the Kent Chamber of Commerce. A public "unleashing" of the dogs and houses is to be held May 30 from noon to 4 p.m. at the Kent Community House. For details about the dogs, their artists, or a list of sponsors, visit the Web site at www.artdogsof Kent.com.

