

OVERCOMING THE ODDS

GREENVILLE AND PIEDMONT KENNEL CLUB SHOWS' OUTSTANDING SUCCESS

BY LINDA AYERS TURNER KNORR



Imagine what is possible if we retrain our brains to focus less on the inconveniences of our problems and more on the possible solutions. Obstacles blocking our paths become creative solutions!

Members of the fancy are continually doing just that. Proof of my theory was evidenced at the successful Carolina Foothills Dog Show Cluster conformation events held in Greenville, South Carolina, July 23-28, at the fabulous Greenville Convention Center.

Following the first shows held in the South during the pandemic, I asked Cluster Show Chair, Kris Harner, to share with us how she and her team were able to put together such successful shows for the Greenville and Piedmont Kennel Clubs.

Harner replied, "The motivation to hold the Carolina Foothills Cluster dog shows was needing to get people back to work for upstate businesses and residents, as well as vendors and handlers. We also concentrated on keeping the community safe, while setting a foundation for others to build upon."

"The work to get approval to hold the show was the most complex part of it all! I worked with the Convention Center General Manager, John Wilusz, the Visitors bureau, David Montgomery, and spending time with emails, phone calls, conference calls, online meetings, Facebook groups and trying to stop rumors and fearful people demonizing the whole thing. I contacted our State, County and City offices, including the Governor's office. My goal was to formalize our plan and convince the powers that be to agree that we would be able to hold this event safely. The Convention Center and Visitors Bureau asked that we push to hold our event as this was a perfect event to start opening the facility, since we could create a detailed plan of how we could safely hold an event while mitigating the safety factors. There were many difficult hurdles, and things were touch and go many times during the planning process. At one point we couldn't get a response from the City Manager, when the city was planning on cancelling all Greenville events.



Show Chairs collaborating; GKC Chair Kris Harner with PKC Chair Suzanne Burns.

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Thankfully, through our former AKC Delegate, Linda Ayers-Turner-Knorr, we had built a relationship with South Carolina State Representative Jason Elliott. I reached out to Rep. Elliott to help us reopen communication with the city manager. Rep. Elliott worked with City Councilman John DeWorken who contacted the City Manager, John McDonough, who put me in contact with the Health Risk Management department to review our plans. After looking over our detailed plans they gave their approval and agreed that this event was indeed a good event to function as a test and they would have observers to see how the plan would be implemented.

As Cluster Chair and GKC Show chair, I was relentlessly dedicated to these shows for several reasons. I was hearing that the dog show community was suffering and needing to get back to work; PHA members, vendors, the superintendents, and AKC staff, judges, etc. Also, my community was hurting and needed to get back to work. To most people, dog shows are considered 'non-essential', but to those who needed to get back to work, our dog shows are part of what gives them employment. Within our local community, our event would help employ the Convention Center Event Staff, including electricians, security, EMT, maintenance, hospitality, custodial, and their parking staff. We also hire private security, clean up, and we provide customers to local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, golf cart rentals, septic company, fuel delivery, local stores, etc. To each of those businesses we are essential to the survival of their families. In April and May, when I doubted that I should continue, I called the convention center, hotels, restaurants, judges and handlers; the responses were of overwhelming joy that we were continuing to pursue the event. Later I was told by some

that it brought tears to their eyes when our event started moving in and they knew it was really happening. That alone gave me the assurance that we'd made the right decision to hold these shows! All of the thank you's from exhibitors, vendors, superintendents, and AKC were very much appreciated.

Back in March, we began evaluating the possibilities of holding our events in July. To be honest, I really did not expect it to be a problem so far out from the initial Covid 19 mass shut down. Nonetheless, I reached out to all the judges, stewards, photographers, facility, and to the superintendent to determine that if we had a show, would we have the necessary support to hold it? At that time, we had all but three judges on board, and all the other organizations were on board. We are blessed to have an incredible Greenville Convention Center facility, with over 225,000 square feet, and a very supportive event staff. After much discussion, we decided we could safely handle at least 2,000 dogs, so we set our limit to 2,000 dogs per day. The lowest number was based on our best guess estimate of how much parking was available and how many people would come with each entry, no shows, support staff needs, etc. We estimated each person would have around 48 square feet of floor space which should offer plenty of distance for people to spread out.

This is the first show ever where we set an entry limit. We also closed the event to the public. Over the next couple of months, we spent time planning the layout. We threw out much of what we did in the past and came up with a completely new layout. We knew we needed to social distance, which required changing the ring layouts. We decided to have an entrance and a separate exit for each ring, which is also now part of the AKC

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recommended guidelines. In order to do that, we needed our rings to have easy access to exit and come back in with a different dog in the next class. This required us to have at least two openings for each ring. By doing this, it allowed each ring to have an opening away from other rings. This allows the exhibitors to leave and come back in without crowding the only entrance/exit opening. The change worked so well and we received enough positive feedback that we will use this for future events as well.”

JUDGES

“One major issue was with judges. We reached out to the judges we had contracts with (remember we contacted judges earlier in April and only three of the 33 hired cancelled). Now with only a few days before the Premium List was to be released, 17 more had decided to cancel. This created a complex problem for our clubs and could have caused us a huge financial penalty. The clubs would have had to spend a large sum to inform exhibitors about judge changes had we not found out until after closing.

Judges should decide the risks for themselves and discuss the issues with their families and, if there are concerns, they should cancel with ample amount of time for clubs to find a suitable replacement. The clubs understand the concerns, and have no hard feelings if a judge cancels with plenty of notice, we just need time to adjust the panel. We owe that to the exhibitors as well. To the judges that stayed with us, and the judges hired at the last minute, we greatly appreciate your willingness to join us!”

GROOMING/CRATING

“The Greenville Kennel Club is lucky to have a PHA member, Jamie Clute. Jamie was a huge part of making a safe show plan. He had great ideas on how we could organize the Grooming/Crating areas. All other events in the area cancelled, so we were able to have more preparation days.

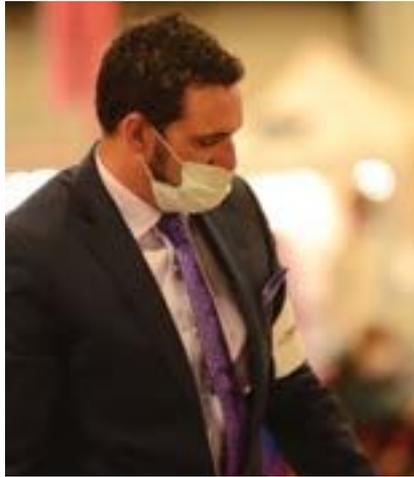
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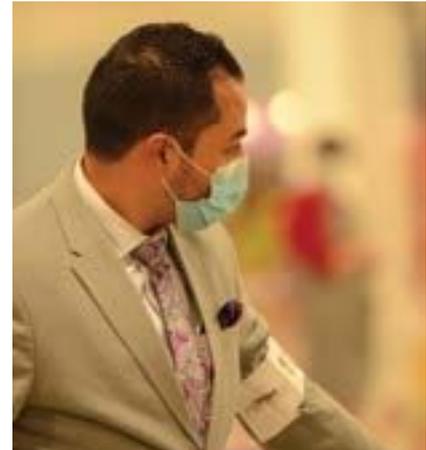
Jamie, my right-hand help, Sue Dwelly, and I made many trips to the Convention Center, planning the grooming space to accommodate all the reserved grooming. We measured it several times to get exact space requirements and details. We did the initial taping off for our vendors, and just the perimeter for the grooming spaces, with a large exterior aisle. Again, we measured how big the blocks would need to be to fine tune our space. Making yet another trip, we added aisles and individual spaces for each person who sent in a reserved grooming request. We had close to 400 grooming space requests. We allotted spaces based on the number of crates and breeds they were bringing. All single crate requests had 6x10 space. For the PHA members, we were able to utilize the space better by having a large aisle over 11', then an 18'x 40' block, another aisle 6', then another 18'x 40' to a 11' aisle and another 18'x 40'. Each of these were given a cross aisle 6' and a second section of the same. As you can imagine, a great deal of time was spent planning the areas to alleviate congestion. What we could have done better would be to have more detail on how to find the spaces assigned. We only gave them the section, then exhibitors had to walk around looking for their name. Next time we would give the section and space number."

MOVE-IN DAY

"After all this planning and taping, the big day finally arrived...Wednesday was move-in day! We allowed our vendors, superintendent, and individuals who had supplies for the shows to drive in from 6:30 am until noon. From 1:00 pm to 11:00 pm exhibitors were only allowed to walk in. (Due to assigning all spare building space to grooming there was no path to drive in and out.) We stationed club members at



Piedmont Kennel Club Show Chair Suzanne Burns using her hand sanitizer.



the doors with the layout and grooming space list sorted by name. We were also lucky enough to have some college students volunteer to help people unload and find their space!"

SANITIZING

"On our show days, both clubs had people to sanitize the rings throughout the day. We needed ten minutes between judging to spray the mats. The products we used needed five minutes to fully sanitize the floor, but another five minutes to allow it

completely dry. All products were EPA approved to fight against Covid and are used in hospitals, veterinary offices, and restaurants. We also kept the photographer stands sprayed and all of the tables: judges, stewards, and exam tables.

The Convention Center had their staff wiping doors, sweeping the floor, and maintaining the bathrooms. They had placed hand sanitizer stations at every door. We added large hand sanitizers at each group of rings.

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Jan Clifford stepped in for me, capturing photo memories of the shows.

Our rings were laid out with at least two open sides and no middle rings. We had an entrance and exit for each ring, and tried to have space away from the adjoining ring. We had 6' barriers around the rings and ringside crating for each ring. The ring entrance/separated exits were really liked by the exhibitors, so much so that we will incorporate it into our regular routine going forward. We found we had to improve [by] adding more ringside crating to alleviate the congestion around the rings and to give better guidance as to where they could go if they were crowded."

SHOW PHOTOGRAPHERS

"One of the AKC recommendations was to have the photographer take pictures with each judge with each ribbon, to be Photoshopped into the individual picture for each dog. After discussions with our photographer, Bryan McNabb, we realized this would not work for these shows. We had three photographers and 33 judges. It would take too much time for all three photographers to take all those pictures every morning. Although the idea may work at single photographer shows with few judges, large events couldn't do it that way. We continued to do show win photos to the same way as we have always done them, with the photographer going to each ring. We only

allowed one exhibitor at a time to have their picture taken, the others had to wait to get their picture. This seemed to work well for us.

Although we had to make changes from our normal way of holding our shows, it forced us to make changes and many of those changes were huge. This actually gave us better control to avoid congestion, not only at the rings, but in the entire building. Much of what we did this year will be implemented for our future shows!"

GROOMING/CRATING

"We measured the building multiple times to gather a true knowledge of space for grooming/crating areas to maintain social distance. We had three large aisles, 20', 11'-20', and cross aisles over 40' near all the rings. Free reserved grooming space was given based on number of dogs and breeds.

The PHA area layout: Perimeter aisle 18' then 9.5' table crate with a 9.5' crate table and then interior aisles were 6'. This allowed everyone to exit to an aisle. Crates were one set of back-to-back. The rest of the layout was Aisle—9.5' (Table-Crate), 6' Aisle—Table-Crate. This basically created blocks of space, again everyone exiting to an aisle. There were perimeter aisles around the edge of more than 18' and cross aisle with 11'

or more. The grooming/crating space was a big hit. Everyone liked how it flowed and felt like they were not crowded. All aisles were at least 10' wide. We did organize our building to have a central PHA area. One end of the building was mostly Toys and Terriers, Non-Sporting, Sporting; the other side of the building was Working, Herding and Hounds.

What didn't go well: It seems some people don't realize the word 'grooming space' is also 'crate space', so many didn't understand the grooming areas we also meant for crating space. So better wording to make sure it is understood, whether you are crating or not, you need space to leave a crate and dog during the shows is what we consider grooming space."

MASKS/SIGNAGE

"We required masks or face shields on at all times when in the building, whether you were able to social distance or not—including alone in your setup. We had put up signs all over the building, focusing on any door into the building. Well it seems wording on the signs conflicted. The main sign spelled out, 'Must wear a face covering your nose and mouth.' Another sign said, 'Must have face covering' with a picture of a person wearing the mask. It was interpreted this sign just meant you had to have a mask with

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Kudos to Lisa Jumper for capturing photo memories.



you, not necessarily wearing it. So anywhere you mention having a mask, be clear it says wearing and how you want it worn. Also be clear if there are times they can have it off.”

ENFORCEMENT

“We walked around the building constantly reminding to put the mask on or pull it up over the nose. The first day we had 99.9% cooperation, second day, 95%. On the third day, we still had 95% cooperation, but those whom we had to constantly remind were starting to push back and even get belligerent. Sunday morning, I had the AKC Representative make an announcement before the National Anthem was played. This was really good and made the difference. We recommend that clubs have the AKC Representative make daily announcements—this should have been done from day one. Make announcements more often throughout the day, by club members. If you find [you’re] patrolling, having to remind lots of exhibitors to pull the mask up or put it on, I would stop judging, have the AKC Representative make another announcement. I believe this would get people to comply better.

In talking to exhibitors, it really was not wanting to not comply, but needing a break from the mask, and I have to say, keeping it on for 12 hours was not easy. Having a mask break would be nice, even if it was only for five minutes. I think this is why we started having to remind people more often. This being said, maybe it would have been better to allow masks off when in their set-up and no one around (10’ circle around the person).”

RINGS

“We had an entrance and exit for each ring, with the steward at the entrance and the judge at the exit. We required the stewards to lay the armbands out on the steward’s table individually (not a stack, but one at a time). The exhibitors walked up to the steward’s table and picked each number they

needed. Exhibitors really liked this set-up. Stewards were not as happy and struggled some. The judge’s table had the ribbons and the judges handed out their own ribbons.

What went well: There was much less congestion for exhibitors waiting to get into the ring with those exiting the ring. There was not an exhibitor who didn’t like having this set-up, even those needing to go back in with another dog in the next class. It actually helped make it easier for them.”

ENTRANCE AND EXIT

“What to improve: Large entry breeds needed a bigger table for all the armbands; making sure the entrance and exit are correct for flow; exhibitors should go into the ring across from the judge and move to the judge’s side; new exhibitors were confused where to exit (have a sign easy to see that says exit here); the exhibits who didn’t get a ribbon were lost on how to leave the ring; marking a 6’ area from the ring gate to keep people from standing up against the rings.”

JUDGING

“What went well: Splitting large classes; bring all dogs in for a class, split it however it works for the ring. For Groups, bring in all the dogs, count them as they enter, split it in half. The judge can either walk down the entire line of Group dogs, then have dogs leave, or once you know you have xx number, the breaking point exits. The judge makes a cut in the first half, keeping at least five dogs.

They exit the ring and the second half enters. Make a cut from the second half; the cut dogs leave and the first kept dogs come back in. This allows the judge to move those keepers together and make the final placements.

What to improve: Communication to the judge from the show chair. By requiring this procedure, it is taking control from the judge. Some judges really did not like doing it this way, but they cooperated and

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Carolina Foothills Cluster Chair, Kris Harner.



found it worked well. Once the flow was established, the Groups didn't really run any longer. (At first it did take a little longer for each Group.) What I found was that in the Breed classes, the judge didn't make any cuts and was having dogs push up against the ring gate to gait half the dogs. The idea of any ring, Breed level or Group, having dogs do this didn't look socially safe, so I would not allow that to happen.

Areas we found we had to modify from the original building setup: Making clear marks on the floor to remind to stay 6' away from ring fencing; putting marks on the floor for where ringside crating or seating is allowed. Both of these items helped to reduce the crowded areas at the rings for Breed and Group judging. It was easier to explain where they could go. Without these clear marks, we had people crowding the ring fence with chairs or trolleys. Once people knew where they could go, it really alleviated the congestion; space for every ring for ringside crating.

Because we had so much space for grooming, and people really were spread out, we did allow hand-held dryers on low

and had to be held in their hands, not by the head and shoulder. This went very well and was very much appreciated.

We had the rings sanitized throughout the day, including all tables and photographer stands. Our show was too large for doing photography like they did at the shows in Oklahoma, so we did them as usual, but we only allowed one exhibit in the ring at a time.

We also had hand sanitizer around the building and were spraying and wiping down surfaces. The convention center staff helped with wiping doors and keeping our bathrooms clean. All doors were labeled for in and out."

Setbacks from the global Coronavirus have caused our daily lives to be interrupted. We have missed our friends and many social activities.

Whenever we are so fortunate to host events like these first Carolina Foothills Cluster dog shows held in the South, we are humbled at being blessed to be a part of such milestones for our sport. Members

of the Greenville (my own Kennel Club) and Piedmont Kennel Clubs exhibited what great teamwork is all about.

For other clubs, I share this message: Many plans may not turn out to be perfect or exactly everything we wish for them to be. But it is important to get started, to see how everyone reacts, and continue to move forward. Take action, making adjustments, modifications and improvements as we continue to learn what we can achieve. Working together we can accomplish our dreams of continuing all of the wonderful sporting activities our American Kennel Club has to offer.

The dog world owes special thanks to South Carolina State Representative Jason Elliott and Greenville City Councilman John DeWorken for their roles in helping this show cluster overcome the odds!

The history of the COVID-19 has yet to be written. But when the story is finally told, the most crucial descriptions for the American Kennel Club will be perseverance, tenacity and love for the sport of purebred dogs. ■