

Columbia Missouri Kennel Club's 2023 Junior Showcase Event

The Columbia Missouri Kennel Club (CMKC) has long supported juniors in both performance and conformation events as evidenced by our own Junior Coordinator, Dr. Grace Freeman.

Dr. Freeman began showing and training dogs at the age of nine in 4-H. She quickly joined the CMKC and switched to exhibiting in AKC Jr. Showmanship at ten with her family's Golden Retriever puppy. Grace was a dedicated junior and learned to present a wide variety of breeds spending most of her career showing Standard Schnauzers and English Setters.

Grace achieved many successes in the junior showmanship ring. Just a few of her notable accomplishments were:

- #1 Standard Schnauzer Jr. handler four years in a row
- Best Junior at the 2012 Standard Schnauzer National Specialty and the best Schnauzer junior handler at "Schnauzapalooza" which all three schnauzer breeds participated in at their national specialty shows
- Chosen as a 2012 Jr. Showmanship finalist at the AKC National Championship show
- Awarded second place in junior showmanship at the 2017 Westminster Kennel Club dog show
- 2015 #1 Sporting dog Jr. Handler, #4 Jr. Handler in the country and best junior handler at the English Setter National Specialty
- Grace has also shown her dogs into the top 20 of their breeds and has co-bred several Berger Picard litters
- Selected as one of the two preliminary judges for the 2020 AKC National junior showmanship competition

Grace is the driving force for the CMKC's Jr Showcase event. She continues to give back to the AKC Junior Showmanship program that taught her so much by taking the lead to welcome young people who love dogs into the Columbia MO Kennel Club. This year's event had fourteen junior entries in both the morning and afternoon Junior Showmanship and Junior Showcase Showmanship competitions, which is an increase in entries from the previous years.

There was even more fun that day with the AKC Registered Handlers Program holding a junior handler clinic with professionals which twenty-two young people, ages 7-17, attended. Originally two handlers were scheduled to work individually with the juniors, however, there were so many participants a third handler was added ringside to accommodate the junior hopefuls. It was a rousing success, supported by multiple compliments from the juniors' parents. It was also successful, in the fact that, many children who were too young for junior showmanship and/or have never participated in AKC conformation/ junior showmanship. I spoke with several of the juniors and their parents during the showcase. One competitor provided the kennel club with excellent feedback. Skyler Acebedo, age 16, won best junior on Saturday with her Portuguese Podengo Pequeno. She had this to say when asked what she enjoyed most about the showcase.

“First and foremost, it provides more opportunities to show in juniors and get chances to for those qualifying wins for Royal Canin and Westminster! But also, I like getting to spend time with other juniors in a junior friendly environment. I like how this showcase brings in former juniors to judge the event. I think sometimes judges like juniors but maybe they were never juniors themselves, so they miss some of the things juniors are required or expected to do. With former juniors judging, especially ones not so far from competing as a junior, they see those things that make a junior unique.”

Skylar also provided the club with good critical feedback for next year’s showcase.

“One thing is to schedule the showcase at a time without judging conflicts. I like having all-breed juniors in the morning and the junior seminar mid-day but like this year, we had issues with conflicts between the showcase and groups. This forced my friend to choose between the two. My friend picked junior showmanship over the group judging, but it kind of stinks to win your breed and then have to miss competing in group. Especially if you show the same dog in both. I also had the same conflict, but the dogs were different, so my mom took my group dog, and I showed my boy in the Showcase. Other than that, I think the showcase is perfect! They just need more kids to realize what a cool thing it is!”

The members of CMKC plan to promote our next Jr Showcase by re-igniting our Canine Ambassador program which ended during Covid. The Canine Ambassador volunteers visit grade school classrooms to make presentations about purebred dogs, responsible dog ownership, and safety around dogs. We can add information about our showcase to the presentations. In addition, we want to test the waters by soliciting support and donations from the many specialty pet stores in our region. Finally, local media coverage would be an excellent way to engage non-dog show families to come to the Purina Center and learn more about junior showmanship.

Dr Freeman is already working on growing the showcase event for the fifth consecutive year in 2024 (albeit one cancelled due to covid). Junior showcase events help stretch those dog show dollars by giving juniors several opportunities to earn points in just one weekend. CMKC encourages all new and seasoned juniors to come to Purina Farms April 6, 2024, to compete in two pointed events in one day, plus participate in the AKC Registered Handlers Program, Handler Clinic with the Professionals. The Clinic is available to any child with or without a junior showmanship number.

The Columbia MO Kennel Club wants to thank Executive Field Representative, Jeff Wright, PHA Member: Paul Catterson and Non-Members: Dr. Grace Freeman and Sharon Svoboda, for helping with this year’s Handling Clinic. Also, thank you to our Junior Showmanship and Showcase judges, Dr. Grace Freeman, Ms. Grace Ann Szczurek and Miss Alexis Lauren Truesdail. Finally, we thank our featured Jr Showmanship contributor Skylar Acebedo. We look forward to seeing her and her junior friends at our 2024 Showcase.

Ultimately, through the inclusion of junior showcase events and junior handling clinics, we’re working to grow junior participation. It is evident that young handlers appreciate and look

forward to special junior activities and events. So, by growing the junior activities and outreach each year at the annual Columbia MO Kennel Club dog show, the club has seen an increase in junior participation and satisfaction.

Respectfully submitted by CMKC AKC Delegate, Theresa Wilson

Co-authored by CMKC Junior Showmanship Coordinator, Dr. Grace Freeman