

## Event seeks to highlight plight of chained dogs

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LAS CRUCES — Volunteers with Dogs Deserve Better sported plastic chains Saturday in an effort to raise awareness to the plight of chained-up canines throughout the county as part of the organization's annual Chain-Off campaign.

In addition to the bright yellow chains, animal advocates who gathered at Albert Johnson Park near Branigan Library, also held large posters displaying messages that urged motorists and passersby to keep four-legged friends off of harmful chains.

The annual Chain-Off event has been held in Las Cruces for the past three years, said Jean Gilbert, vice president of ACTION Programs for Animals.

"Our objective is to bring awareness to the plight of chained dogs," she said. "This is definitely an issue in Doña Ana County and Dogs Deserve Better estimates that there are tens of thousands of dogs throughout American that are chained up."

Dogs Deserve Better, a nonprofit organization, hosts Chain-Off events annually around the July 4th holiday.

While Americans celebrate freedom and independence, the tens of thousands of chained and penned canines are still not free, the organization states on its website. The campaign began in 2004, when one woman chained herself to a doghouse for 33 hours, and has since grown to include more than 100 people sporting chains throughout the country and even in Canada and Romania during last year's Chain-Off in an effort to raise awareness.

The organization's largest fundraising campaign, Dogs Deserve Better, aimed to raise \$30,000 in this year's Chain-Off, according to its Web site.

As a member of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico and the Community Coalition for People and Pets, Gilbert said that education is the solution to ensuring that canines and people alike are not harmed because of the use of chains. Incidents of injuries and even fatalities among people who have chained-up dogs have been reported, she said.

"When a dog is chained up, he doesn't have that human interaction and socialization that's so critical," Gilbert explained. "The dogs are blamed and certain breeds have bad reputations, but it really isn't its fault."

Parents Against Chained Dogs is a division of Dogs Deserve Better that works to educate parents on the humane treatment of these four-legged creatures to prevent potential attacks on children, she added.

Incidents that require the involvement of authorities typically result in the animal being euthanized.

Chains can also become painfully embedded in the skin around canines' necks and cause the animals to experience heatstroke, especially as temperatures reach the triple-digits in New Mexico's summer months, said Amy Gonzalez, ACTION Program for Animals board member.

"If the dog can only walk around in, say, an eight-foot radius, it might not be able to find shade," she said. "A lot of people think, 'Well, it's just an animal, so it can deal with this,' but they're wrong. I hope that (this event) opens peoples' eyes to how uncomfortable, harmful and dangerous it really is for dogs that are chained up day in and day out."

Residents throughout Dona Ana County most often cite an inability to pay for new fencing as the reason for keeping pets chained up in the front or back yards, Gonzalez explained.

"APA volunteers will work to mend fences so that residents don't feel the need to keep dogs all tied up," she said.

"It's cruel and unusual punishment," said Anna Juarez, the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico's foster care coordinator. "Dogs who are chained live in constant fear, sometimes without shade or water."

Juarez and 3-year-old Apollo, a mix of German shepherd, boxer and pit bull, have attended each Chain-Off event held in Las Cruces in the past three years.

Unlike Juarez, who sported a yellow dog chain, Apollo's collar and leash were made of a safe and comfortable canvass.

"He's the best dog I've ever owned," she said of Apollo. "And he's the best big brother to the puppies I foster."

In addition to raising awareness for Chain-Off, Juarez also encouraged animal lovers to support the pups in area shelters in an effort to lower the number of euthanized dogs.

Those residents who are unable to adopt a dog in need of a loving home are encouraged to lend a hand by providing a temporary foster home, volunteering time or making a monetary donation to local animal advocacy organizations, she said.

"I even volunteer as a dog taxi, taking dogs from Las Cruces to Albuquerque or Arizona so that they can live with a loving family. I didn't even know there was a need for someone to do that until I adopted Apollo," she said. "Even volunteering to walk the dogs at Safe Haven Animal Shelter may seem like such a small thing, but it makes all the difference in the lives of those animals."

For more information on the Chain-Off campaign, visit [www.dogsdeservebetter.org](http://www.dogsdeservebetter.org)