

Article

Spotlight on: Missouri Earthdogs Club

“Earthdog” isn’t a word you hear every day, but for Shirley LaMear and the Missouri Earthdogs Club, the word refers to something they’ve been focused on for more than 10 years.

Earthdogs refers to a group of dog breeds bred to work in the ground and hunt vermin. Well-known earthdog breeds include Dachshunds, Terriers, and a breed dear to LaMear and the group – the Jack Russell Terrier.

“We have the Jack Russell breed to blame for the existence of our club,” says LaMear, founder and director of Missouri Earthdogs. Back in 1997, Bonita Knickmeyer of Cedar Hill was organizing a group of Jack Russell guardians in her home and introduced the dogs to earthwork, which includes racing and navigating an underground tunnel system. The group (which included LaMear) outgrew Knickmeyer’s property and decided to hold events at Purina Farms in Gray Summit. Not wanting to limit themselves to Jack Russells, the group named themselves Missouri Earthdogs to include all earthdog breeds. They built the first earthwork, or underground tunnel system, at Purina Farms for the first trial Memorial Day weekend in 1997. Over the years, they have added four more complexes at the farm.

What started as a small group of earthdog enthusiasts chipping in their own money to get the trial off the ground soon blossomed into something much bigger. The same year the group started, Nestle Purina PetCare was putting together the Incredible Dog Challenge (IDC), which included such events as herding, retrieving, flying disc, agility and Jack Russell racing, and would be filmed for national television.

“Jack Russell racing is a staple at trials, and the excitement and quickness of the terriers seemed an entertaining and good fit for the TV show,” LaMear says. “After our first year we became a staple of the event and have organized the races for Nestle Purina and the producers of the show, Carson International, ever since.”

This year’s Incredible Dog Challenge took place on October 4. Jack Russells from all over the country came to compete in the finals. A Missouri Earthdogs Club member took second place in the race.

“Everyone who comes back to race at the IDC goes home with an experience they will never forget,” LaMear says. “The day of the finals is a great mingling not only of the competing dogs, but of all the dogs coming to watch. It’s a free event, and dogs are always welcome at Purina.” The event will air on ABC Jan 24, 2009.

Besides organizing the trials and finals at the Incredible Dog Challenge, the Missouri Earthdogs Club also does rescue work and holds Fun Days at Purina.

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