

Paw Patrol

Canines “flock” to join Lavallette’s goose control effort



By Susan Kotch, Coordinator, Lavallette Goose Patrol

As a parent of a young child, Joanne LaCicero would gaze out her front window at the ballfield across the street and watch the Lavallette Elementary School children playing with their sports teams in the grassy, fenced-in Chandler Ball Park. She knew her own son might one day be playing as well on that field. The only problem was it was covered in goose droppings. And that didn’t sit well with her.

In a barrier island resort town where lawns are made of stones and sand, grass becomes a luxury for wild fowl. The Canada Geese would literally flock to the field to enjoy uninterrupted meals and rest, leaving behind a dirty mess. Baseball and soccer players, as well as kids who just wanted to fly a kite on a breezy day, found themselves in the middle of that mess. But from necessity comes invention. And being the wife of the Mayor of Lavallette, Mrs. LaCicero knew to take her idea right to the top.

Back in 2005, Lavallette’s Goose Patrol was established out of need. The idea of allowing residents to bring their dogs to the enclosed ballfield when the students weren’t using it and allowing them to run off-leash to deter geese from getting comfortable was not widely accepted at first. Some on the town’s Council questioned the logistics, the legality, and the safety aspects, but Mrs. LaCicero was determined to address all of those points. Now in its 12th year, the Lavallette Goose Patrol has been responsible for a very clean and dropping-free public ballfield at no cost to the borough.

Getting members that first year was a challenge, Mrs. LaCicero recalls. “I literally walked up and down the streets with my own dog trying to find others out walking, telling them to stop by to let their dog run in the field. To most I met, it was a very appealing proposition, and it soon caught on that the enclosed park provided a fantastic way for local dog owners to exercise their pets and socialize them with others. In doing so, the geese were given a clear warning to stay away from this ballfield. The result was tremendous.”

Fowl fight

Not only is the Goose Patrol a benefit to those using the ballfield, it does so at no cost to the Borough. In fact, the savings of not having to employ an outside company to do the same job proved to be significant.

“Prior to implementation of the program, the Borough investigated several other methods to deter the geese,” Lavallette Mayor Walter LaCicero explained. Patrols included periodic visits by commercial noise-producing devices, and predator



HOW IT WORKS

In order to ensure the safety of both human and canine participants, each member must register their dog with a \$10 annual fee.

The registration requires that all canines have proof of current rabies vaccination.

In return, a tag identifying the dog as a Lavallette Goose Patrol member is worn on the dog's collar.

A three-person committee, nominated by the Council each year, works to monitor the program, but members are encouraged to self-police each other. That part doesn't seem to be much of a problem, however, as the dog owners find that being part of the Goose Patrol is a social activity for themselves as well.

For convenience, small mailboxes have been secured to the fence along the field where members can grab a plastic bag to clean up any accidents, and with the registration funds collected for the program, the Lavallette Goose Patrol has already purchased two canine fresh water stations, one located at the ballfield and another installed along the town's scenic bayfront, for dogs to take a break during a walk to have a drink of water.

The group hopes to purchase more stations in the near future.

silhouettes. The cost for periodic patrol was extremely high, thousands of dollars per year. Silhouettes were tried and not effective. Sound deterrence was tried at the local yacht club and also proved ineffective. Several towns that had tried the periodic patrol found that the geese returned soon after the patrol ended. We had nothing to lose and everything to gain by trying this innovative approach. It has proven to be spectacularly successful.”

Community benefit

The program has built positive bonds in the community. “Many of the members have become friendly and look forward to seeing each other at certain times during the day,” Mrs. LaCicero commented. “Our members are very friendly and enjoy meeting the other members, so if someone shows up and inquires, veteran members will immediately explain the process for joining.”

Another positive aspect of the program Mrs. LaCicero has seen is the increased number of elderly members who may not have the stamina to exercise their dogs easily, and welcome the chance to have their dog roam the fenced-in area of the ballfield, chasing balls and other dogs around the grass.

“This was something we hadn't planned for, but are happy to see in a town where a large percentage of our population are older residents,” she added.

Currently, there are four areas within the town of Lavallette where the Goose Patrol dogs are encouraged to visit. There are over 100 dogs registered for the program this year. 🐾

@ For more information on the program, contact Lavallette Borough Hall at www.lavalette.org.



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