

Happy Anniversary Dog Park at Ocean Reef

by Holly Houser, Ocean Reef Press Editorial Assistant

It's no secret, Ocean Reef loves its dogs, which is made evident by our annual Blessing of the Animals celebration, monthly Yappy Hours in season, and most importantly, the Dog Park at Ocean Reef. In the midst of all going on with the coronavirus is something to look forward to – the Dog Park at Ocean Reef has hit a milestone and will celebrate its 10-year anniversary this fall.

In honor of the anniversary, the Ocean Reef Press sat down at the Dog Park with a few Members who were instrumental in its creation and one thing was especially evident – the Dog Park is as important for the Members who frequent it as it is for their dogs.

Before the Park's creation, Members didn't have a dedicated space to run their dogs off-leash.

"At the time, our dogs were the only part of our family that didn't have a place of their own at Ocean Reef," explained **Stacy Schmetterer**, who was the first Co-Chair of the Dog Park Board along with **Lin Brown**. "We really felt there was need for a safe place to take our dogs and that's really where it all began."

The idea of a dog park was supported by many and a group of dedicated Members took on the task. **Claude Kershner III**, along with fellow ORCAT board members at the time, led the search for a plot of land to host the Dog Park.

"We knew dogs were an intricate part of our Ocean Reef community and we also wanted to create a different way for Members to connect," he said. "Along with support from ORCA staff, Lin Brown and Stacy Schmetterer, we visited



Gretchen Riley and Patti Simms enjoy a morning trip to the Dog Park. They routinely visit twice a day!

different areas on The Reef, called people asking if we could use different plots of land, and one day we just got lucky."

John Lee, who has also been involved with the Dog Park since the very beginning, explained the search committee came across a piece of property owned by the Ocean Reef Community Foundation. Unable to build on it, the Foundation donated it to the Dog Park. That, Lee said, really became the turning point, and with support from neighboring Harbour House and its Board Member **Michael Betz**, development of the Dog Park began.

"The initial goings were not easy, but we had a lot of people behind us," said Lee. "It didn't take long to get the donations we needed.

Once we had the property and the funding, the first big step was getting the fence in and after that it just evolved. We were so fortunate because once the Foundation supported it, then Card Sound supported it by providing water and ORCA got involved. So it's typical Ocean Reef. Everybody came together to make it a very special environment."

The first Dog Park, now known as the Large Dog Park, was actually built in 2009. After acknowledging there should be a space to allow large and small dogs separation, the Small Dog Park followed suit in 2010.

Now a decade has passed and the Dog Park has become more than just a place for the pets.

"It started out as a place to bring your dog and it ended up as a social center," said Dog Park Chairman, **Sarina Kinney**. "It's a place where people come together to talk. The expression, 'I heard it at the Dog Park' is a true thing."

Lee agrees saying, "The Dog Park answers a very significant need. The dogs need a place to run and it's such a complementary social sphere at the same time. I think the support from the Club has been overwhelming, from the Foundation to the Ocean Reef Board to ORCA to the Members."

Gretchen Riley, who was at the Dog Park with her two Westies at the time of this interview, drove the point home. "I asked a group of friends if they suffer from Dog Park withdraw when they're up north for the summer and every single one of them said absolutely. And what's also amazing is the number of people that come to the Dog Park who don't have dogs and just want to have a dog fix."

Dog Park usage has grown steadily since its introductory year, but saw a larger increase after turf was put in a few years ago. Prior to the turf, the Park had grass and several years of rain and dogs running around made it messy and difficult to maintain. Kinney says the turf has significantly increased the number of people who use the Park because it's cleaner and easier to use.

"We decided on turf and we



Arie the Frenchie at the Dog Park.

raised money within a couple of months – everyone was on board because you didn't want to bring your dog here anymore and have to give them a bath when you got home," said Schmetterer.

Kinney said those who used the Dog Park immediately agreed to contribute funding, calling it "a very Ocean Reef moment."

The Dog Park continues to operate on a donation basis and its Board asks that Park users donate an amount of their choosing each year. If you're interested in helping the Dog Park, take a visit! There's a donation box located just underneath the bulletin board at the entrance to the Large Dog Park.

"Our pets are part of our family and having the Dog Park makes life at Ocean Reef complete for dog owners," said Schmetterer. "There's a place at The Reef for everything and everybody, two or four legged."