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Canines reflect their cities

Fluffy, pampered pooches predominate in Oakland

BY STEVE NEAVLING • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • FEBRUARY 29, 2008

This weekend, more than 3,000 dogs of various breeds arrive at Cobo Center for the annual Detroit Kennel Club Dog Shows that end Sunday.

Even before they come to town, metro Detroit already is bustling with dogs.

A look at vet and dog licenses from a sampling of communities in the tri-county area shows pooches reflect their towns and cities.

Truffles, for instance, is a bichon frise, who has an ever-revolving wardrobe of tuxedos, sweaters, scarves, coats and business suits, is treated with holistic medicine, visits psychics and eats only the best organic food.

Truffles and her owner, Patty Livernois, live in one of Oakland County's ritziest communities -- Bloomfield Hills.

About 20% of the registered pooches in Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Auburn Hills and Rochester Hills -- 1,570 -- are fluffy lapdogs, like Truffles, compared with 7% in blue-collar Warren and Eastpointe. Those communities have a larger share of golden retrievers, known for romping blissfully in backyards. Nearly 10% of the 7,587 registered dogs in those towns are golden retrievers.

In Detroit, as many as 10 pit bulls have lived with Sheila Hines since her home was burglarized seven years ago.

"I thought if I had a protective dog, the intruder wouldn't have been in my house," said Hines, who bred pit bulls until recently.

The City of Detroit couldn't give exact data, but officials said there most likely are thousands of pit bulls in the city.

Of the more than 7,500 licensed dogs in Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Auburn Hills and Rochester Hills, there are just 31 registered pit bulls. By contrast, Eastpointe and Warren have more than 800 licensed pit bulls among about 5,000 registered dogs. Dog licenses aren't a perfect count of breeds. In fact, only an estimated 20% of pooches are even registered, despite laws requiring it.

But some trends emerge from dog licenses.

Brawny dogs, for example, tend to live in cities. Pit bulls and German shepherds are most common in Detroit, while rottweilers and boxers are concentrated in cities such as Warren and Eastpointe.

Docile, full of personality and content with little exercise, designer breeds and fluffy lapdogs such as Truffles are most popular in affluent cities with owners who spoil them.

Smaller, more traditional and inexpensive breeds such as beagles, dachshunds and shih tzus stand out Downriver, where they are the top three dogs behind Labrador retrievers.

The patterns of dog ownership show that people often choose dogs based on image, said Lisa Peterson, spokeswoman for the American Kennel Club.

"If someone wants a macho image, they pick a certain type of dog," Peterson said. On the other hand, "people buy toy dogs for companionship."

Overall, the most common breed in the tri-county region is a Labrador retriever. It is trailed, in order, by German shepherds, golden retrievers, shih tzus, rottweilers, pit bulls and beagles.

A dog's name says a lot, too. Where else would Killer the pit bull, Tank the rottweiler and Rocky the German shepherd live than Detroit? Fat Boy the mutt and Fonzie the rottweiler chill out in Eastpointe. West Bloomfield, with a median household income nearly twice the state average, is home to Prada the bichon frise and Versace the poodle.

TEXT FOR PATTY PICTURE 1:

Patty Livernois of West Bloomfield uses a doggy backpack to carry her 17-year-old bichon frise Truffles earlier this month. "My dog is like a furry child," Livernois says. (PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press)



TEXT FOR PATTY PICTURE 2:

Truffles' accessories include gold chains with its name spelled in diamonds on one, aquamarines and a garnet on a gold name tag on another chain, and healing stones on a third chain.

(PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press)



TEXT FOR PATTY PICTURE 3:

Patty Livernois of West Bloomfield rolls Truffles' stroller into Livernois' Royal Oak store called the Uppity Puppy. Truffles' wardrobe consists of tuxedos, sweaters, scarves, coats and business suits. (PATRICIA BECK/Detroit Free Press)

