

Distillery District hosts first canine convention

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BY DEE GIBNEY

It's barely open and already The Distillery District is going to the dogs as Woofstock unleashes its animal attractions next weekend.

Billed as a festival for dogs – accompanying humans are welcome of course – it's the first event of its kind says organizer Marlene Cook. Known for her successes with other “one-of-a-kind” events (the Old Clothing Show and Sale, the Old Paper Show and Sale and the Sunday Antique Market at St. Lawrence Market) Cook has pulled together an event that no urbane canine will want to miss.

There will be contests, fashion shows, prizes and the latest in modern living design for the image conscious pooch.

Say goodbye to wire cages and plastic crates. Enter Bowhaus, a company that designs dog crates that look like modern furniture to better blend with humans' concept of good décor.

Banish plastic and aluminum bowls forever. Now there's the real McCoy – dog dishes made by an Ontario potter to resemble the highly collectible creamware.

You can sign up for Five O'clock Dog – a dog walking service that delivers Rover to your office so you can indulge in some quality time by walking home together at the end of the day.

Accessorize your pet for a stroll with doggie clothing like the line of black leather jackets by Roots. There's even something for rainy days –fashionable raincoats as well as a line of Roots “paw” towels to wipe off those puddle-prone paws.

Cook makes a line of cashmere sweaters for dogs that she manufactures out of recycled pieces. So there's no excuse for a dog not to be at his/her fashionable best for that casting call – did we mention the pet talent agency? Pet X Talent Agency will be on hand to discuss Fifi's potential for TV commercials or even movies.

There'll also be an opportunity for contenders to strut their stuff at the doggie fashion show while the traveling dog will appreciate the services of Lyon Pet Travel Agency.

For those with more common tastes (and with a nod to Dave Letterman) there's the Stupid Pet Tricks contest which will be hosted by CTV's Mike Bullard.

Other contests include the cutest and ugliest dog, the smallest, the largest and the most like its owner. Registration is one hour before the contest.

"It's quirky and unusual," Cook says, "and it's completely uncharted territory."

It's also completely unpredictable. Where else does designers risk having their models bolt with the clothes on their backs for a little roll in the dirt?

"It's not like the pet show at the International Centre where you have breeders and their products and big dog food companies but you can't bring your dog," says Cook. "Toronto is not very dog friendly, it's not like New York or Paris."

That may be changing. The event's major prize give-away is a VIP (very important pet) weekend for Fido plus two human guests. It includes a night at the Fairmont Royal York hotel, a doggie make-over by Petiquette, a contemporary portrait done by an artist specializing in pets and a \$200 Roots gift basket.

Diana Olsen, owner of Balzac's coffee house, will be offering dog themed cookies for her two-legged patrons during the weekend. A dog owner herself, she has always provided bowls of water and dog biscuits for visiting canines and will be stocking up on treats for the Woofstock rush.

For her dog Bruce, the resident coffee house greeter who has happily adapted to both condo and café life, it will feel like Christmas.

He will be treated to a new collar and leash, a doggie make-over, an elegant new bed to blend with his owner's condo décor (they live across the street from the coffee house), and best of all, a Roots jacket. "He's definitely a Roots dog," Olsen says with a chuckle.

