

# South Florida Sun-Sentinel

SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2007



**GETTING TO NOSE YOU:** Nathaniel Harr, 12, of North Palm Beach, peeks out from under the judges' table as he is greeted by a contestant at the 13th annual Pet Parade and Contest at the Gucci Court Yard along Worth Avenue in Palm Beach. Photos/Josh Blitch

## PETS GET DRESSED TO IMPRESS

BY PAOLA IUSPA-ABBOTT

PHOTO BY JOSH BLITCH

**PALM BEACH** — A 130-pound Bouvier des Flandres named Bear stood out among the other dogs dressed up as a puma, inmate, a tacky artist, a yacht commandeur and Anna Nicole Smith's mother, Virge Armour.

Bear attended the 14th annual Pet Parade and Contest on Palm Beach's ritzy Worth Avenue on Saturday, but not to compete. After all, the 14-year-old dog had won several "Best in Show" awards since 2003.

He was there to tell "a story of hope," his owner, Mignon Roscher Gardner, said. Bear survived malignant melanoma that appeared on his left front paw a year ago. An experimental vaccine recently sent the cancer into remission and extended his life expectancy. Initially diagnosed to be 90 days, Gardner said. Every two weeks for three months, Gardner drove Bear from Palm Beach Gardens to the Medical Center in New York for treatment, including chemotherapy.

"I am so thankful I have Bear," she said. "Big dogs usually don't live this long. Bear and Jolie, 10, are our kids," she said, referring to Bear's mate.

On Saturday, most of the contestants walked with the ease of runway models on the small stage set up in the Gucci Courtyard. The Worth Avenue Association hosted the event to remind patrons that on the avenue, one of the world's most exclusive shopping destinations, pets are welcome, said Jackie Sletkov, the event's spokeswoman.

"It has always been this way," she said.



**ROYALTY:** George the Pomeranian waits to take the stage with his owner, Kathie Petrie, of West Palm Beach, at the pet contest.

built in 1924 outside a shop in the 300 block of Worth Avenue.

Some of the hundreds of pet owners who attended the event sought some of the spotlight. Betty Françoise Saxe, of Boca Raton, wore a

hat. On a leash was Frosty, her 35-pound American Eskimo, who wore a black-and-white inmate uniform with a matching cap.

"He was arrested for eating too many biscuits," Saxe said.

Cindy Katcher has been photographing weddings for 25 years, so dressing up her adult toy dogs as a groom and a bride just made sense, she said.

Evian, 7, looked comfortable in the black tuxedo; Jasmine, 11, was clad in a white dress. Katcher carried Evian's hat and Jasmine's shirt and veil. She also brought a white pillow to serve as a tray for a set of rings in a jewelry box and two biscuits, instead of a wedding cake.

Sherry Radu, of West Palm Beach, dressed her English bulldog Rodney to look like Virge Armour. A blonde wig covered Rodney's head and a light blue dress wrapped his body. Pictures of Anna Nicole Smith, a toy shovel, fake \$20 bills and a bag of dirt hung from the dress.

"I like to do topical things," she said.

For Bradford Miller the event was bitter-sweet. He recently lost his dog, Rocky, a companion of 17 years. He missed not having him around and decided to mingle with other pet owners Saturday. A few months ago he wrote a book about Rocky and what he learned from their relationship.

"He was my life," he said. "I took him for granted. When he died, it hit me hard. With my book, I want to help people deal with the emptiness they feel when their pets die."

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