

Education

How much is that doggie?

Incarnation Parish students bond with puppy they will auction at school fundraiser in May.

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By Angela Hokanson

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Like moths to a flame, the first-grade students at Incarnation Parish School flocked to their adopted puppy, Sam, at school's playground on Wednesday.

They kneeled in a tight circle around an inflatable kiddie pool as first-grade teacher Diana Girskis placed the dog in a few inches of warm water.

"I'm going to let you guys give Sam a chance to have a little bath," Girskis said.

The children took turns lifting handfuls of water onto the puppy's back, and massaging doggie shampoo into his fur. If the students had inched any closer to the puppy, they would have been in the pool, too.

Sam accepted the dozens of petting hands graciously, lounging calmly in the water and barely making a peep throughout the cleaning session.

"We need more dogs," Girskis joked, surveying the eager students.

Sam, a nearly 4-month-old "cockapoo" — a cocker spaniel/poodle mix — is being raised with the help of the first-graders in preparation for an annual fundraising event to benefit the school. He was donated by Just Paws Pets, a pet store that has a location in Glendale, and he will be auctioned off on May 3 at the school's annual spring auction.

Dogs like Sam can retail for \$1,700, said Erica Rowlands, the parent who organized the donation from Just Paws Pets.

Sam will be only one of the draws at the auction, which is raising money to upgrade the school's electrical system and install central air conditioning, Principal Olivia Carrillo said.

Each grade in the school works on a project that is then auctioned off at the fundraiser. Other grades are working on items like cookbooks and pieces of furniture, while the first-graders are caring for the puppy.

Getting the students involved connects them to the school community, and gives the to-be-auctioned items more sentimental significance, Carrillo said.

And educators at the school thought it would be a way to teach students to respect and appreciate animals.

For the last month and a half, Sam has alternated between staying with Rowlands and Girskis. He visits the students at Incarnation twice a week, Rowlands said. The students mostly just play with him, but in the coming weeks they'll also paint a dog house and create a photo journal of his days as a puppy for the auction.



First grade schoolchildren at Incarnation School give Sam the cockapoo a bath on Wednesday. Students have been taking care of Sam since he was donated to the school several months ago. (Roger Wilson/News-Press)

Through his frequent visits, Sam has become a beloved pseudo-member of the first grade, students said.

"It's like having a friend that you know come into the classroom," said Sydney Cahill, 6.

Many of the class members expressed their deep affection for the dog, but said their parents were not likely to be the ones to purchase him.

Still, Rowlands and Girskis predicted that, because of the strong bonds the first-graders have forged with the pup, it would likely be a first-grade parent who will take the dog home from the auction.

"He's so mellow and very confident around children," Rowlands said of Sam.

The auction will take place during an event called "A Night of Elegance," which will also feature dinner and dancing.

The event begins at 6 p.m. on May 3 and is being held at Brandview Collection in Glendale. Tickets can be purchased through Friday.

For ticket information, contact the school office at (818) 241-2269.

ANGELA HOKANSON covers education. She may be reached at (818) 637-3238 or by e-mail at angelahokanson@latimes.com.

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