

Oklahoma City's Paw Park recognized among na

Don Bobzien designed Paw Park, an Oklahoma City dog park that was recognized by Southern Living magazines as one of the best in the country.

BY HEATHER WARLICK-MOORE  8

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When Don Bobzien envisioned building a dog park in Oklahoma City eight years ago, he likely never thought it would bloom into the oasis for dogs that it is today.

Built and maintained by donations from people and organizations, including *The Oklahoman* and the Kirkpatrick Foundation, Paw Park, at N Grand Boulevard and Hefner Parkway, is not only a place where dogs go to have fun, it's a place where people go to meet like-minded people.

"The dog park is the easiest place in Oklahoma City for total strangers to talk to total strangers," Bobzien joked. "I mean, they have in common their dogs. ... Pretty soon some great relationships start out there. We've had some that developed into great romances."

And it's not only Oklahoma City residents who have taken notice of the dog park's allure. Recently, the park was recognized in two national magazines.

In its May 2010 issue, Dog Fancy, one of the world's premier dog magazines, published "America's Best Dog Parks" contest, and Paw Park was ranked one of the top 13 in the United States.

The same month, Southern Living magazine named Paw Park as one of "The South's 5 Best Dog Parks."

These accolades came as a surprise to Bobzien and the volunteers who work at the park.

"We were, needless to say, very pleased to hear about that," he said. He later learned that Dog Fancy magazine had sent scouts across the country to find the best dog parks.

There are several attributes of the park he said likely made it stand out from the country's more than 1,000 other dog parks.

The park's most attractive feature, at least to dogs, is probably its pond. While pet owners may not love the smell of wet dog, most dogs love the chance to frolic among friends in the pond's cool water on hot Oklahoma days. Water stations, trees, benches and lots of room to run are just a few of the reasons that many dog owners can barely spell aloud the word "park" without their dogs going into fits of excitement.

"It's very gratifying for me sometimes, if I'm in the area, to pull up and watch people

drive down that little lane into the park," Bobzien said. "If the windows are open, dogs' heads are hanging out the windows. And if the windows are closed, you can see dogs bouncing back and forth, knowing that they're getting close to the park."

Looking out for the welfare of animals is something that's always been close to Bobzien's heart. Years ago, he was president of Free to Live, a no-kill animal shelter. He's now on the board of Central Oklahoma Humane Society.

In May, as part of the Humane Society, Bobzien lobbied the state government to pass puppy mill legislation, sometimes called the black market breeders bill.

Bobzien is an Oklahoma City resident well known for his animal rights and community activism, but the state has gone one step further to make sure his name is familiar to dog lovers from out of state who travel across state lines on Interstates 40 and 35.

Don Bobzien Dog Parks at rest stops greet travelers as they enter the state from Kansas in Blackwell and from Texas in Erick. Two more of the parks are planned for the east and south highway entrances to the state.

"It's kind of a neat deal. I modestly accepted that," Bobzien said.

Though dog parks are not Bobzien's life's work — he owned men's clothing stores for years and later worked in banking — now that he's retired, perhaps he's doing his most important work.

"Now I just kind of do the things I like to do," he said. "Animal welfare is one of them."



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