



# Dog parks offer fun and freedom

By Naomi Sakovics

►► Frankie, a two-year-old Dutch shepherd, likes running up and down the hill and peeking behind her to see which of the many friends she's made during her daily jaunts at the dog park is chasing her.

Elayne Claus, her owner, has been taking Frankie since she was four months old—sometimes twice a day—to the dog park at Knox Farm State Park. The eighteen-mile trip from the Town of Boston to the park in East Aurora doesn't deter her. It's a beautiful, peaceful place, she says, and as enjoyable for her as it is for Frankie. "It's where I go to to get grounded, get peace of mind, watch my dog have fun, and talk to some of the people," she says.

Parks catering to canines have been popular in other parts of the country for decades and finally took hold in Western New York over the past ten years or so. Residents can take their furry, four-legged best friends to a number of locations that offer fun—and free—ways to spend some quality time outdoors. These parks provide an enclosed outdoor space where dogs can zoom about as much as they like uninhibited by leashes. For dog owners who do not have a fenced yard, dog parks may be among the few places where their pets can have off-leash experience.

Marcia Rafter Ritchie, training director for The Family Companion dog training group, has more than thirty years of experience in dog training. She says that dog parks are important for socialization, as it gives the dogs the opportunity to interact with one another. By playing with other dogs, they learn to communicate.

"Dogs are often better teachers than people are," she says.

There are, however, some important safety tips to know before going. Make sure the dog is up to date on all vaccinations and is at least four months old. Additionally, make sure that the dog plays well with others; don't bring an aggressive dog who may hurt or

bully another visitor. For the first time, be sure to ease the dog into the experience. "You don't want to bring the dog during a really busy time," Ritchie notes, "Maybe pick a quieter time, maybe when the weather is not so good, so the dog is not overwhelmed by a herd of eighteen other dogs."

Owners should be sure that their dogs will return to them when called, and the dogs should have had some basic obedience training. It's best to avoid bringing treats, as this could cause a group of dogs to come running at once, or cause fights among the dogs. Bags to clean up accidents are essential. Many parks will, however, provide bags, as well as water sources.

One of the most popular dog parks in WNY is the one Frankie visits at Knox Farm. At around six acres, the expansive park is divided into three areas: one for puppies and small dogs under thirty pounds and two main areas available for all dogs.

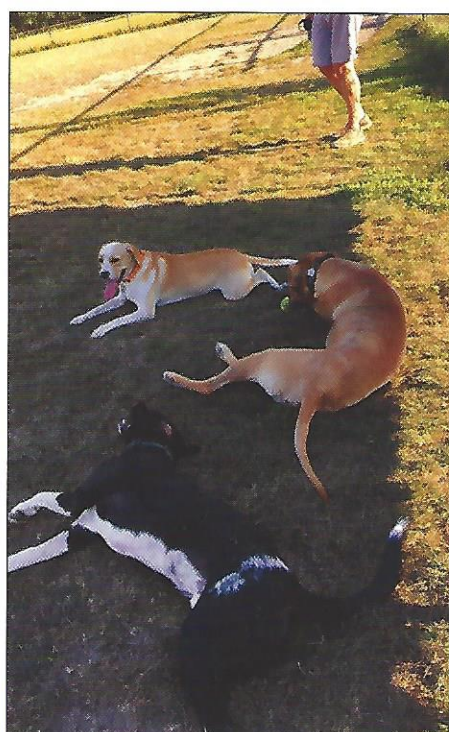
"It's a lot like watching kids on a playground," says Andrew Hillman, park manager at Knox Farm. "It becomes almost like a family activity. People bring their children and their dogs, and they all participate."

Established in 2013, the park regularly attracts between 300 and 400 cars on weekdays and between 400 and 600 on weekend days. Seventy-five percent of those cars are visitors to the dog park, says Hillman. People come from all over the region, even from as far out as Darien, he says.

Claus, Frankie's owner, understands why it's so popular. It's a place for making friendships, relaxing and, most important of all, having fun. "She's got like five girlfriends and two boyfriends," she says of Frankie, noting that the friendships made at the park have even transferred out of it. "We even went over to one of her friend's homes today. They play really well." 🐾

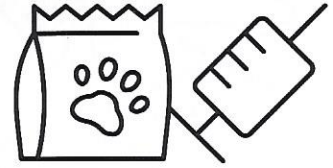


Lewiston Dog Park; (at right) Knox Farm Dog Park





## FREE OR CHEAP RESOURCES FOR PETS



By Judith A. Rucki

Owning a pet can be an expensive proposition. Last year alone, the American Pet Products Association estimates that owners spent \$69.36 billion. When cutbacks are necessary, studies show people will spend money on pet food rather than on dining out.

*Pet owners looking for help feeding their animals should check out [episcopalwny.org](http://episcopalwny.org). There are free pet food pantries available at:*

**St. Aidan's Episcopal Church**

13021 West Main St., Alden  
11 a.m. to noon on the second  
Saturday of each month  
716-937-6922

**Ascension Episcopal Church**

96 Jewett Parkway, Buffalo  
3 to 4 p.m. on the first Sunday of  
each month  
716-833-1151

**St. Matthias' Episcopal Church**

374 Main St., East Aurora  
1 to 3 p.m. on the first and third  
Tuesdays of each month  
716-652-0377

**Grace Episcopal Church**

100 Genesee St., Lockport  
11 a.m. to noon on the third Sunday  
of each month  
716-433-2878

**Trinity Episcopal Church**

62 West Buffalo St., Warsaw  
2 to 3 p.m. on the first Sunday of  
each month  
585-786-5285

All4Pets will provide a one-time monetary grant to help pay for life-saving medical treatment for pets whose owners are unable to pay due to low income, personal crisis, or disaster. Payments will be made directly to the medical care provider. See [all4petswny.org](http://all4petswny.org) for more information.

Erie County offers free rabies vaccination clinics for dogs, cats, and ferrets. Check [www2.erie.gov](http://www2.erie.gov) for dates. Also check [niagaracounty.com](http://niagaracounty.com) for the 2018 rabies clinic schedule.

At [bringfido.com](http://bringfido.com) you can find pet friendly restaurants that welcome dogs at their outdoor tables. 🐾

### DOG PARKS IN WNY

**Knox Farm  
Dog Park**

437 Buffalo Road,  
Knox Farm State Park,  
East Aurora

**The Barkyard**

D A R Drive, LaSalle  
Park, City of Buffalo

**The Paw Park**

550 Smith Road,  
Amherst

**Lewiston  
Dog Park**

Earl W. Brydges,  
ArtPark State Park,  
Lewiston

**Ellicott Island  
Bark Park**

1 Ellicott Creek Drive,  
Ellicott Creek Park,  
Tonawanda