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Animal lovers support family of murder victim at pet walk

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The Dick family has felt like the Fort Collins community has supported them since their daughter and sister Linnea was murdered last year, but never was that support more evident than it was Saturday.

About 350 people took to the trail circling Spring Canyon Community Park with their four-legged friends for the first Linnea Dick Memorial Pet Walk and Adopt-a-thon, displaying support that Linnea's mother Opal Dick said was phenomenal.

"I have to thank the community for its continued support and love," Opal Dick said, holding her daughter's Chihuahua Lage in her arms. "Animals will be helped today because they're here and that's what would have been most important to Linnea."

The Dick family started planning the memorial pet event about eight months after Linnea Dick, 20, was sexually assaulted and killed in May 2008 by Justin Curl, who is now serving a life sentence in prison.

The family says they wanted to put on the event to allow their daughter and sister to have an influence on the community even after her death.

"This really says something about the community," said Pat Pitt, who along with his wife Jean is friends with the Dick family. "And it's just great for the family. ... It's great weather today; there's sunshine for a reason."

Event participants paid fees going toward local animal charities and walked one mile around the park, observing photographs of Linnea along the way. There also were pets to be adopted and local animal businesses.

Along with the pet walk, Opal Dick said the Chihuahua races were especially fun and meaningful for her. Before her death, Linnea's family says she always had wanted to enter Lage in a race, but she never got that chance.

On Saturday, Lage finally had the chance to bolt out of the gates in a race, but instead of sprinting to the finish line, he got distracted along the way and never made it, eliciting laughter from the large crowd gathered to watch the races.

"He decided he wasn't a racer after all. He's a lover, not a racer," Opal Dick said of Lage.

Still, Opal Dick said she's certain Linnea enjoyed the races.

"I believe she's here, watching the Chihuahuas," she said.

Another pet on hand Saturday that Linnea would have been proud of was Baron, a blind German shepherd owned by Laura Bevacqua. Baron was rescued by Linnea's aunt, Rose Carroll, who is a co-

founder of the memorial event's main sponsor Animal Rescue Connection.

Opal Dick said Baron was exactly the kind of dog her daughter would have been passionate about helping.

Bevacqua said Saturday was a big step for Baron, who is just learning new commands and how to be comfortable around other dogs and humans.

"He never would have been able to do something like this in a million years," Bevacqua said.