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Rubber ducks invade Stephens Lake for Central Missouri Humane Society event

RACHEL TREECE *Apr 9, 2016*



Rubber ducks are dumped into Stephens Lake during the Central Missouri Humane Society's Duck De Stephens Lake Park on Saturday in Columbia.

COLUMBIA — Rubber ducks helped save real animals Saturday afternoon.

The Central Missouri Humane Society hosted the animal-saving event, billed as the CoMo Duck Derby, at Stephens Lake Park. Attendees were able to adopt rubber ducks, which were entered into a race along the banks of Stephens Lake. Proceeds went to the Central Missouri Humane Society, an organization that promotes animal welfare.

Duck derbies have occurred in many other places around the U.S., but this was the first time they made a quack in Columbia.

Michelle Casey, assistant director of the Central Missouri Humane Society, helped coordinate the event. At a recent conference in Arizona, Casey won a competition with GAME Fundraising that allowed her to plan a duck derby for free. GAME provided all the materials needed for hosting the derby, including the thousands of rubber ducks. GAME's Derby Duck Races often benefit nonprofits, organizations and clubs across the U.S., according to group's website.

Columbia's race began at 2 p.m., but festivities started at noon. Before the main event, attendees got to waddle around a variety of activities like face paintings and raffles for small prizes.

By race time, Casey said the humane society probably met its original goal of 5,000 adopted ducks thanks to last-minute participants. She estimated the humane society raised roughly \$20,000.

But not every attendee adopted a duck. Last summer, Jeri Cay Phillips, a Columbia resident, donated something bigger — a set of wheels — that was featured at the derby.

"Her name was Bonnie," said Phillips, referring to what was previously a white 1988 Pontiac Bonneville, a hand-me-down car for her kids.

After her children grew up and moved out of Columbia, Phillips felt it was time to part ways with the nearly 30-year-old sedan. When she donated the car to the humane society last year, she thought she'd never see Bonnie again.

But the humane society held on to it and transformed the car into one of the derby's mascots, dubbed the Duckmobile. Not only was old Bonnie's name changed, but she was also painted yellow and decorated with duck feet.

Another race-goer, DeeAnna Adkins, brought along her dog, Taylor, for the event. Although Taylor was adopted from the animal shelter Second Chance, she felt the event was important for all adopted animals. To help the event, she bought a \$25 Quack Pack, entering six ducks into the competition.

"I wanted to come out and support the Humane Society and see the duck race," she said.

The race itself, though, posed a bit of a challenge Saturday afternoon. Casey said the original plan was to have the fire department use a hose from one of its trucks to help create a current that would move the rubber ducks. But organizers learned that sometimes fire hose water comes out slightly oily, and they decided to scrap Plan A.

So, organizers went with Plan B: A woman in a kayak paddled out and swirled the water around the floating ducks, whisking them to the finish line. This plan worked better, but the winners weren't immediately known.

The humane society plans to announce the first-place finisher, who will receive \$1,000, on Monday.

Casey said she was "definitely satisfied" with the race and was pleased with how much the rubber ducks helped support real animals.

"It was a fun and unique way to promote the different services we offer," she said.

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