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PLAN THE PERFECT PUP PARTY

By Diane McCartney, McClatchy Newspapers, Source: MCT News Service

WICHITA, Kan. _

With dogs, as with human guests, the key to a successful gathering starts with the guest list.

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A birthday celebration on July 18 for 1-year-old Digby attended by 20 of his friends was pretty much typical of a party for any youngster. One guest ran off with the birthday boy's new toy, another guest cried when he lost sight of his mom, and at least one guest overdid it and got sick.

"It usually gets pretty chaotic," said Digby's mom, Jennifer Hardman of Wichita, Kan., who was throwing her third birthday celebration for her dogs.

"But amazingly, everybody gets along pretty well and is pretty well behaved."

Parties for dogs _ including not only birthday bashes but puppy showers, obedience school graduation celebrations and "whine and cheese" soirees _ are becoming more popular, as more people think of their dogs as members of the family and include them in family celebrations.

Web sites like dogbirthdaysandparties.com and tailwagging.com sell party favors, decorations and treats and offer tips for hosting the perfect pet party. Guests at Digby's bash ate peanut butter-carrot birthday cake, splashed in three pools, dug through a treat-filled pinata and played games, including "musical sits."

Monica's Bundt Cake Co., which supplied the birthday cake, sells "bow wow bundts" for dogs in three flavors: peanut butter, beef jerky and chicken jerky, said employee Katie Clark.

"At least every month someone orders one," usually for a dog's birthday, Clark said. The small canine cakes cost \$9.95, but larger ones can be ordered, she said.

Hardman's other two dogs, Flash and Mo, were among those wishing Digby a happy day, along with neighbors, family, friends and co-workers of Hardman, a veterinary technician at Wingert Animal Hospital, and their dogs. Breeds ranged from

Pee Wee, a toy poodle brought by veterinarian Christina Richards, to Phineas, a Great Pyrenees owned by Hardman's sister, Debbie Freese, and also included French and English bulldogs, rat terriers, a pug, a mastiff and a golden retriever.

"We've got quite the variety here," said Richards, who also brought a miniature poodle and two German shepherds. "I'm surprised we haven't had more scuffles."

As with any party, the key to success starts with the guest list, Hardman said. Most of the dogs that attend her parties already know each other and are well socialized.

"I don't usually invite a dog that I know doesn't get along well with others," she said. And when it comes time for cake, she doesn't just set it down and let the guests go at it.

"Everybody gets a plate for their dog, and then we kind of spread out and feed them," she said. "Everybody needs to give the cake at the same time so we have no issues."

Dog trainer Janice Ronald offered some other tips, including making sure all dogs, especially young puppies, are properly vaccinated. "It wouldn't hurt to put on the invitation: 'Please make sure your dog is current on vaccinations,'" she said.

If a dog has issues with other animals coming to his home _ Digby certainly didn't _ it might be a good idea to have the party at a park, doggie day care or other neutral territory, Ronald said.

(EDITORS: BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM)

The Splash Park at Valley Center's Wag'en Tail Ranch has hosted four dog birthday parties in the past year, said owner Stacy Miles. Renting the indoor water park costs \$300 for two hours, for up to 10 dogs, Miles said. She supplies the cake and decorations, and people bring their own treats and party favors. The dogs "have a blast, they really do," Miles said.

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For guests, Ronald offers this bit of advice, which could be applied to any party: "Don't overstay." "If your dog is starting to get tired, anxious or frightened, or acting aggressive" _ a sign it might be anxious _ "it's time to pick them up and go

home," she said. And when it comes to birthday cake and snacks, "don't overindulge," Ronald said. "You don't want throwing up or diarrhea the next day."

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