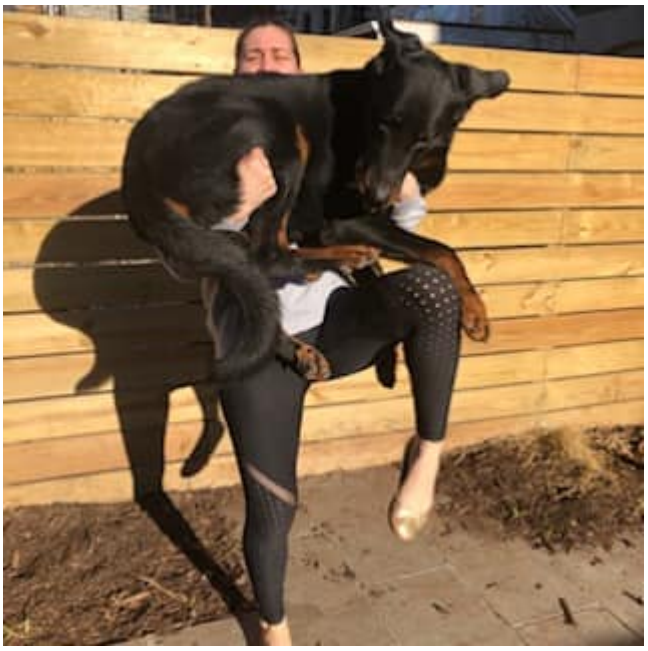
Why be a Club Member?

An Opinion Piece by Robyn Salley

I have been a Beauceron owner for 3 years, and a member of the Beauceron community for over 5 years now. There's a constant theme I see in our community – desire for control. We want to control who breeds, who joins our community, which dogs win in each venue, what tests are needed, what dogs are rescued…the list goes on and on. In this article, I will discuss how being a member of the American Beauceron Club can be a productive outlet in that pursuit of control and a measured approach for not overstepping reasonable limits to that control.



Robyn struggling to pick up Nyko

A bit snarky, don't you think? I was hoping to catch your attention with this excerpt. As we move to a newsletter that is easier to

generate from the website instead of expecting our volunteers to spend hours and hours on end formatting a pdf (Debbie Baker – we feel your pain on this!), we're also able to track when people are actually clicking through the "Read More" to finish reading the full article. The numbers, unfortunately, are disappointing. A major benefit to joining the club is access to the newsletter which is intended to be a repository of information about the club (minutes, letters from our officers, treasurer updates, titles, etc.) as well as a source of valuable information about the breed (articles carefully curated from the membership). If people aren't reading the newsletter, then why have they joined the club?

That brings me back to the idea of control. Now I know Di Brown is sitting off to the side sighing loudly at the structure of this article, but I know she'll bear with me as I struggle to make my point.

The club is the mechanism by which Beauceron community is organized to influence the general public and liaise with the American Kennel Club (which, while AKC is not the only kennel club in the US, it is the main one that Beauceron owners utilize for titling). The club is who can recommend changes to the breed standard, health testing, and breed education.

The club is our organized voice. The club is our mechanism for control.

As of late, Facebook has been our (dis)organized voice. With the rise of social media, the ability to organize and promote voices has become much easier through ad hoc Facebook groups that reach beyond just a niche community. I know there was a Yahoo! Groups presence before, but the connectivity to the rest of "DogBook" and the general Facebook public does not really have a parallel through that medium.

Now before anyone starts to get their hackles up, I'm not going to bash Beauceron owners and their Facebook presences. In fact, I am impressed with how our community has utilized social media. We are making our voices heard. Our networks are so wide! There's connectivity across continents that is amazing. The ease at which people, like I did years ago, can learn about the breed and begin to contribute positively is fantastic.

My argument, though, is that we stopped using our club in favor of Facebook which has led us down the route of exerting control over everything instead of focusing our efforts on the areas where we do have systematic power to make changes.

Don't get me wrong, we need both.

We need the community outreach that social media can provide. We need the groups to be able to quickly and easily have important discussions. We need to build our communities in a way that social media platforms facilitate by the nature of their design. But,

beyond that, we still need to utilize our club to take all of these ideas and get them approved by formal processes and get them embedded in AKC (and other kennel clubs we choose to associate with).

To do that, we need to take all of those leadership and organizational skills that we see displayed so beautifully through groups such as Beaucerons in North American, Beaucerons Worldwide, Beaucerons in Obedience & Rally, Beauceron Breed Standard Review, et al. We have the skills in our community to manage people and ideas! And, guess what, they do it for free!!!

We should leverage that skillset in our board – moving from a model that is constantly putting out flames to a model that sets goals for each committee with deadlines and follows up on them. Within our committees, we have chairs who should provide the board and the membership with regular updates on the good work that they're all doing. Within our membership, we should have outreach programs to make sure that each voice is heard and every idea is accounted for.

If we harness that energy, we can harness the ability to make changes to critical concerns from the club in a timely manner (Are elbows required? Are they not required?). We can discuss every rule in our Code of Ethics with the level of criticality we discuss the rules for a Facebook group.
We can address membership complaints with the same gusto we do

when someone
slides into our PMs to say there’s a potential person trying to sell puppies
through one of our groups.

We just have to get organized and recognize the difference between social media and a non-profit club. That gives us our community and it
gives us our focused control.

I commend all of our volunteers – none of these jobs are easy, within the club or outside of it. I just want us to all take a step back
and look at our club. What can we do to use the club to better the breed in the
ways that we all so desperately want to?