

Headline **Dog day afternoon**
Date **14. Aug 2008**
Media Title **The Star**
Section **StarTwo**
Circulation **293375**
Readership **1026812**

Language **ENGLISH**
Page No **T13**
Article Size **272** cm2
Frequency **Daily**
Color **Full Color**
AdValue **8642.59**



Dog day afternoon

UPM's 12th Dogathon 2008 was memorable in more ways than one.



THE happiest moments of my life are often those that I share with my faithful canines. This past Sunday was one such glorious day.

I was invited to the 12th Dogathon 2008 at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Serdang, Selangor.

I was there to grace the occasion as Majlis Bandaran Petaling Jaya councillor and president of Petpositive, an animal-assisted therapy society for the handicapped and the elderly, which I set up two years ago.

My job was to officially bear witness to a *Malaysia Book of Records* feat that the UPM students were trying hard to achieve. They wanted to amass as many as 600 dogs at the event, which they accomplished.

The half-day programme was attended by more than 2,500 visitors, placing their latest annual event as the most successful to date.

To me, the 600-dog gathering, together with the crowd that turned up, was not the only achievement that UPM can be proud about.

More than a dozen people in wheelchairs and others with walking difficulties were also present that day.

Few organisers would go through all the trouble to invite

»It was heart-warming to see the lengths the UPM students were prepared to go to, to ensure that their disabled guests can also participate«

the disabled to enjoy their events.

With the myriad of activities lined up for the day, it was heart-warming to see the length the UPM students were prepared to go to, to ensure that their disabled guests can also participate.

People with disabilities had special access to the disabled-friendly car parks and toilets. The students also ensured that none of their disabled guests went home hungry – courtesy of Domino's Pizza. The best part, however, was that the disabled were also invited to be judges at the competition, making them feel important during the function.

What a big difference this was compared to the usual charity events that are held for the disabled. More often than not, such occasions only reinforce negative stereotypes of the disabled.

As for me, I joined a number of VIPs on the stage.

I was touched to discover a specially-built ramp for my wheelchair to gain access to the stage. Soo, my service dog, was also expected to join me on the platform. None of the distinguished guests created a fuss about Soo being there. They knew Soo provided assistance for me as a wheelchair user.

As for the Golden Retriever, he was true to form as the perfect service dog by being virtually unnoticed in the background.

He showed no interest in

anyone. He did not offer anyone a tail wag. He also kept his nose and tongue to himself.

Even when the refreshments were served, he was disinterested, even looking the other way.

His only job was to stay close to his master and be there for me during situations when I required him to pick up things I dropped or help in the toilet. Soo stayed close to me during all the official events like popping the confetti with the VIPs and the flag-off for the dog walk race.

He ignored all the other dogs, the pretty ones as well as the male ones that occasionally tried to give him a nip to get his attention.

What a dog. What a day. And what a delightful opportunity for people with disabilities.