

“They will humble you.”

The Chihuahua Club of America has been making a real effort to expand and enhance our juniors program and will continue to do so in the coming years. At our shows we are beginning to offer handling clinics and other opportunities for our juniors; and we are also featuring juniors in the Chi-Chatter, our club publication, and on our website. We have never had a huge number of juniors, and I believe that is partly due to the fact that many of the young people associated with dogs have been told they cannot do well in the juniors ring with a small dog, and especially with a toy. This is not surprising, but it is unfortunate. Juniors handling toys have to work just as hard, and in many cases harder, than their colleagues who show larger dogs. Toys come with a special set of problems, and in many cases are much more difficult to train than their larger counterparts. If you ask the professional handlers about handling Chihuahuas, most will tell you that it is a difficult breed, a breed that has a mind of its own. In the words of one, “they (Chihuahuas) will humble you.”

There are many things that we can do on the national level to support our juniors, beginning with Judges Education, which emphasizes the skill, dedication and expertise that juniors showing our breed must possess. The CCA is currently working on a scholarship program for our juniors, along with programs designed to enhance the visibility of our juniors in the show community. On the regional level, clubs should always offer junior showmanship classes at their specialties. Any hands-on handling classes or programs provided for juniors will satisfy one of the AKC educational requirements for regional specialty clubs, making this a win-win situation. On the local level you can each support juniors by going to watch when a junior with a Chihuahua is showing, and being supportive of their efforts. In past articles, I have spoken about studying handlers in order to learn something of the art of handling; no one is more adept at this than a junior. Actually, just go watch the juniors show; you might be surprised at their expertise, and learn something in the bargain. At the risk of being redundant, “They will humble you.”

We are the stewards of our breed; however we must look beyond our tenure to the future. Soundly grounded and well trained junior members are needed to fill our shoes in the coming years. It is in our best interest to provide every educational opportunity that we can for these young people. The junior showmanship ring is about skill, poise, presentation and the rapport between handler and dog. These youngsters develop personal skills and self esteem that will be helpful all through life; and with a little luck, they acquire a love of the breeds they show that will last a lifetime. This is the reason that the National and Regional Breed clubs need to support them, and provide every opportunity within their means to keep them interested and committed to the sport.

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