

PARTING SHOT FROM JOSHUA BESSEX

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



Cars drive along the Astoria Bridge into a fog bank on the Washington state side of the bridge in April.

ODDITY**PURRRRR-FORMANCE ART**

Paw-athletes compete in Hallmark's Kitten Summer Games

By LEANNE ITALIE
Associated Press

NEW YORK — What do the four-legged footballers of the Hallmark Channel's Kitten Bowl do in the offseason? They go for the gold in their own Summer Games, including a de-cat-hlon and freestyle wrestling.

And, bonus, the 90 or so furry Olympians were up for adoption by the rescue group North Shore Animal League America, organizers said this week at the taping of the TV special to air August, in time for the human games in Rio de Janeiro.

The cuteness quotient was off the leash as the tiny competitors found their footing on bite-size playing fields, frolicking on scratchable rings at the gymnastics "venue" and jumping little hurdles decked out with delectable feathers intended to keep competitors on the move over at track and field.

Escapes were corralled by spotters, who ringed the sets as huge cameras shot the action.

'Underdogs'

Beth Stern, North Shore's ambassador and wife of shock jock Howard Stern, was on hand. She's a self-proclaimed crazy cat lady, filling her Instagram with the couple's



A cat takes part in the long jump event in Hallmark Olympic Stadium this week during the taping of the Hallmark Channel's Kitten Summer Games in New York. What do the four-legged footballers of the Hallmark Channel's Kitten Bowl do in the offseason? They go for the gold in their own Summer Games, including a de-cat-hlon and freestyle wrestling.

many fosters and six permanent pet cats. She keeps an eye out for special needs cats, sheltering two that are blind, with one that has only three legs due to arrive soon.

"Those are the underdogs," Stern said. "Those are the ones that sadly wind up in shelters for way too long."

Stern is a magician in finding homes for her fosters, totaling more than 200 in the last couple of years.

"We always have a house full of fosters," she said from

Tuesday's sidelines. "But we are dog people, too. We both love all animals."

Hallmark decided to stage a kitten Olympics special on the success of its three Super Bowl-timed Kitten Bowls. Mary Carillo, an NBC sports reporter who will be in Rio, is co-host of the kitty games despite her allergy to cats. She was joined by David Frei, who retired this year as the longtime host of the Westminster Kennel Club show telecast.

And yes, he was seen fraternizing with scandal! a kitten or two.

"I do love cats, but we have two dogs," Frei said.

'Kitten season'

The kitten games, including some full-grown cat "judges" also up for adoption, come during "kitten season," the time of year that homeless female felines give birth at rapid rates.

"It's when the temperatures are warmer.

That enhances the mother cat's heat cycles," Stern explained. "That results in hundreds upon hundreds of cats and kittens in so many shelters right now and they become overcrowded. People need to learn to spay and neuter. If they see strays in their yard trap, neuter and return. Let's try to solve this problem."

In addition to promoting adoption through the Kitten Games, North Shore will hold an adoption marathon

starting April 30 and running for 36 hours, straight through to May 1. More than 700 dogs, cats, puppies and kittens will be available.

Carillo, loaded up on allergy meds, is a Kitten Bowl veteran. We caught up with her when there was a slight, er, paw in the competition.

"Unlike a lot of other professional athletes, they kind of take their sweet time. All of a sudden in the middle of a big event there's a cat nap," she smiled. "They don't know the rules. They don't care. They kind of just freestyle it at an awful lot of these events."

Carillo, too, has dogs, including Petey Boy, a rescue. Despite her allergy, she once owned an outdoor cat in Florida and loves them just as much.

"And they're actually terrific athletes. Their balance, their movement, the way they stalk," she said.

Purrrrr-formance

Rio will be her 13th straight turn as an Olympics reporter, analyst and commentator. She has already made a couple of trips to shoot feature stories. But on this day, it was all about the cats.

Was she worried about purrrrr-formance enhancing drugs among the furry, fleet-footed hopefuls? A couple of the competitors were bristly proportioned.

"I tell you what, they're not afraid to dip into the catnip? I've noticed that myself," Carillo joked. "You've gotta keep an eye on them. They're animals, and they're blood-thirsty competitors."

JJ Ignatz/Hallmark Channel via AP

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From left: Hillary Borrud,
Mateusz Perkowski,
Paris AchenCAPITAL
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