

DSA Salvation Army Bell Ringing

By Maggie Ouillette

Bell ringing for the Salvation Army is one of the most rewarding activities that Dog Scout groups participate in. It provides an opportunity for DSA members to serve their community, show off their dogs' skills, and share the message of responsible dog ownership.

How to get started:

Locate the local Salvation Army headquarters on your area. This can be done by looking in the local telephone book or by searching on the internet. When you make contact with someone from the Salvation Army, it may be helpful to mention the success that other troops have had. If they have questions that you aren't able to answer, refer them to Dog Scouts of America Director Lonnie Olson.

Make sure to stress that as members of Dog Scouts of America, the participants are responsible dog owners and the dogs are well behaved. Request a location that gets plenty of shopper traffic and ask for several red kettles. Wal-mart stores have proved to be popular and profitable, with the scouts filling up a kettle in three hours.

If you are having trouble getting the Salvation Army to agree to allow the dogs to participate, volunteer to ring without a dog. When they see that you are committed to the program and follow through with your commitment, they may be more willing to allow the dogs to take part.

Troop leaders should approve all teams that will participate. The participants will be representing Dog Scouts of America. As such, it is important that they set an example of good dogs and responsible dog owners. A dog doesn't necessarily need to have passed the Dog Scout test, but they do need to be well behaved around people and other dogs. All dog/handler teams should take part in a 'trial run' at a local strip mall or shopping center. This is the opportunity to assess how the dogs will tolerate the chaotic environment of shopping carts, foot and car traffic, and noise. It's wise to schedule the dry run a couple of months prior to the date of the event. That way the members' dogs that are identified as 'marginal' can have the opportunity to refine their skills. The troop may want to meet as a group for practice sessions prior to the event. Refer to the document [Dog Scouts and the Public](#) for specifics of how to prepare dogs for public events. Other helpful info: [Fundraising Guidelines](#), Useful Items list below.

Once you have arranged a date and location for your bell ringing event, prepare a schedule of dog/handler teams. Schedule 1 to 2 hour shifts for each team. If possible,



include one person who can work 'dogless' so that they are available to answer questions and hand out brochures, run errands, and handle dogs if necessary.

Use your judgment in scheduling. There is a fine line between entertaining the public and being a nuisance. It's best to limit dog/handler teams to 2 per shift. Take care to schedule the most compatible dogs to work together, and schedule single shifts for dogs that are good in public, but not totally comfortable around other dogs. We've found it helpful to have a basket or bucket for each dog, so there is not danger of dogs wanting to guard 'their' basket.



You will want some signage that clearly states that the dogs are fundraising for the Salvation Army, so that there is no doubt who will receive the money. Label all your



baskets and buckets with the Salvation Army shield logo. I was able to download the logo off the Salvation Army website. We've also found it helpful to put some signs on the dogs that indicate that they will take the \$ or do tricks for donations. Another suggestion is to sew simple red capes and embroider or iron on simple phrases such as "bell ringer" or "I'll take your donation"

Some examples of signs for dogs that folks have used in the past:

- "I will take your dollar bills and put them in the basket"
- "Give me a donation and I'll get a treat"
- "Ask me what tricks I can do for your donation"
- "I'm helping the Salvation Army"
- "Dog puts \$ in bucket"



For those dogs that haven't quite mastered money handling, brush up on a couple of cute tricks or dress your dog up in an irresistible costume. You can also teach your dog to ring bells that hang from the Salvation Army tripod, or create a ring-o-matic device that the dog can nudge with his nose or strike with his paw. Use every opportunity to educate people of all ages regarding the appropriate way to greet dogs. If you feel your dog is uncomfortable with a particular person or situation, immediately remove your dog from the situation and explain that your dog needs a break. Also, if your dog is overwhelmed or shutting down, know that you can and should remove your dog so that bell ringing remains a positive experience for your dog. Dogs have different degrees of tolerance for how much of any situation they can

handle. Don't overwork your dog. One day your dog might work a full hour, another day they may only be able to do 30 minutes, that's alright!

Memorize the Dog Scout mission "promote responsible dog ownership and recognize the importance of the human-canine bond" so that you are prepared when people ask about Dog Scouts.

Don't forget festive holiday apparel! Shoppers love to see the dogs dressed up in festive scarves or Santa hats. Holiday themed scarves, sweaters or hats look great on the handlers too. If possible wear a DSA sweatshirt or nametag, and make sure your dog wears his/her uniform or scarf. For cold weather climates, layered clothing, scarves, hats and gloves are a must. Disposable foot and hand warmers are invaluable. If the pavement is icy or salty, bring boots for your dog. Your dog's comfort is essential. Bring a rug or blanket for you dog to lie on. For short coated dogs, make sure to provide a sweater or coat. For those fortunate to live in warmer climates, protect your dog from hot pavement and/or excessive sun. Shoppers will inevitably be concerned about the dogs' comfort. Assure them that you have adequate water and treats, and that you give the dogs frequent breaks. Be prepared for unexpected weather conditions such as high winds, icy rain or extreme heat or cold. Place a brick or rock in the money cauldron to prevent it from blowing away!

Appearance is everything. Keep your area free from clutter and trash. Don't block entrance or exit doors or traffic paths. Remember to thank donors for their generosity.

USEFUL ITEMS:

- Signage which plainly states that the dogs are Dog Scouts collecting \$ for the Salvation Army
- Baskets or buckets for dogs to place the \$ in
- Warm clothes, hand and foot warmers
- Dog boots if the weather is extremely cold or the pavement has been salted (for those of us who live in cold weather climates)
- Festive holiday wear such as scarves or hats for handlers and dogs
- Dog treats
- Water for dogs
- Snacks for people
- Rug for dogs/people to stand on
- DSA and troop brochures, and business cards
- Bell for dogs to ring
- Bells for "dogless" people to ring
- Don't forget...poop bags!!

Send out press releases to local television and radio stations and local newspapers about a week before the bell ringing event. Designate a troop member to act as spokesperson to the media. Be sure to take photos of the event.