

QUICK to JUDGE

Michael Borga, 14, of Point Pleasant, leads 3-year-old poodle Mitsy through the agility course at Clever K9 in Lakewood. THOMAS P. COSTELLO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Junior handlers, dogs head to Fla. agility competition

By Amanda Oglesby
Staff Writer

LAKEWOOD — Poised and ready to run, ginger-furred Chancy focused intently on the face of 12-year-old Kaitlyn Scripko of Jackson. After a moment of eye contact, Kaitlyn burst into action, leading Chancy — a Pembroke Welsh corgi — through a tunnel, over small jumps and up and down ramps inside the Clever K9 Dog Training center, here.

The two are preparing for the American Kennel Club Junior Agility Competition to

be held Dec. 16 in Orlando, Fla. This will be the American Kennel Club's first junior agility competition, open to qualifying dog handlers under the age of 18, at the annual Agility Invitational.

Kaitlyn, her 14-year-old brother Kyle, and mother Ann Marie Scripko — who owns Clever K9 Dog Training — will attend the Agility Invitational with Chancy and dogs Dash, Ruby and Wolf.

The Juniors Agility Competition is open to the top 50 junior handlers in the country, said Ann Marie Scripko, 42, of

Jackson. Agility is a newer type of dog competition than obedience training, and is growing in popularity, she said.

In agility competitions, dogs race through an obstacle course of tunnels, seesaws, jumps, A-frame hills and suspended tire jumps. Dogs must complete the course with no mistakes, such as knocking over a jump. The shorter the time the dog completes the course, the higher the score, Scripko said.

"Agility is like a team sport. It's a lot of running, a

lot of adrenaline," said Scripko, who trained horses professionally before deciding to train dogs.

Many of the same principles apply to training dogs as training horses, she said.

"If you're on a horse and make a mistake, it's a lot more serious," said Scripko, who broke her back horseback riding five years ago. "Most people don't break their backs running a dog. It's a little bit safer."

Scripko shares her love of

DOGS

Continued from Page A1

training dogs in agility trials with her two children, as well as Nancy and Michael Borga Jr. of Point Pleasant. The Borga family, with their 14-year old son Michael Borga III, will join the Scripkos in Florida to compete in the Junior Agility Competition.

Michael Borga III, a student at Memorial Middle School in Point Pleasant, will run 3-year-old poodle Mitsy in the competition.

"It's fun because it is interesting," Michael said about training dogs.

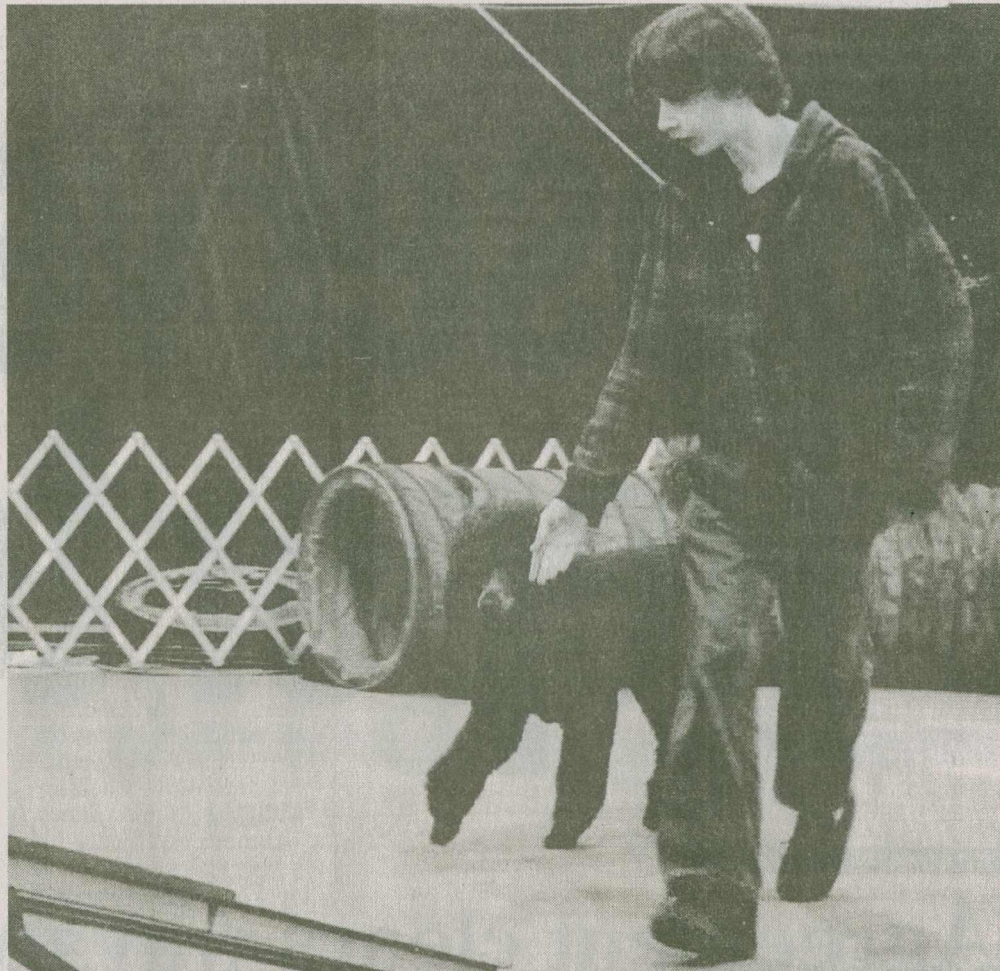
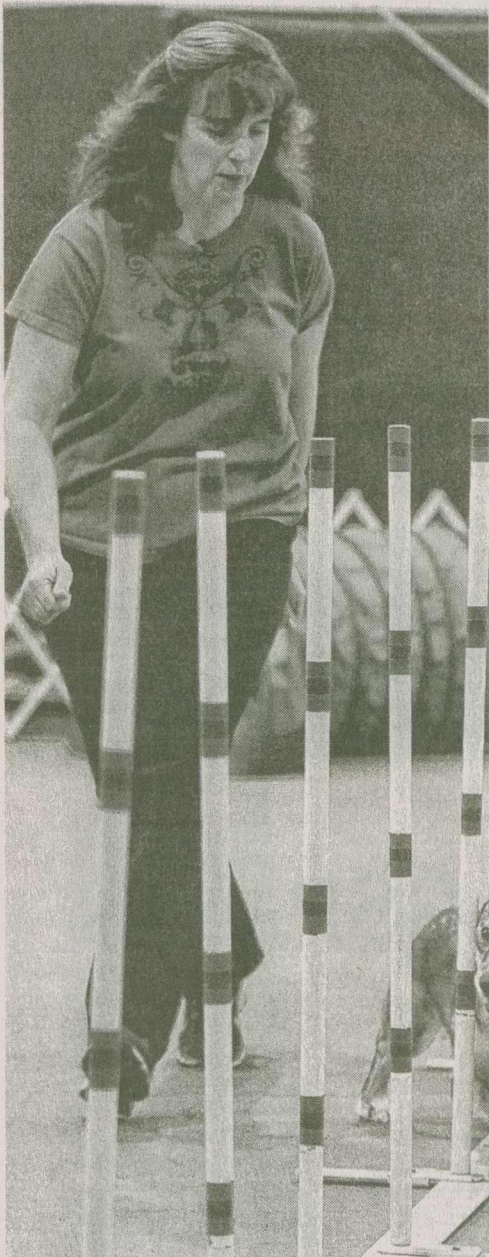
The competition is "just another day of playing and having fun" for the dogs, said Kyle Scripko, who will compete with his 4-year-old Belgian Malinois named Dash. "More kids should try (dog) agility."

Chancy continued to race around the track, his paws pounding the spongy floor while his eyes fixated on Kaitlyn. Occasionally, the Christa McAuliffe Middle School student would treat Chancy with tiny pieces of cheese after a lap around the course.

"The dogs really love it," said Michael Borga Jr. "Even the old dogs will do this until they drop."

First-place winners of the Juniors Agility Competition will

Ann Marie Scripko, of Jackson, leads Wolf through weave poles at Clever K9 in Lakewood. THOMAS P. COSTELLO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Michael Borga, 14, of Point Pleasant, leads Mitsy through the agility course at Clever K9 in Lakewood. He is preparing for dog agility competitions in Florida.

receive \$100, a medallion and placement rosette, and a monogrammed leash, according the American Kennel Club website.

Attending the junior competition "is going to be a first for all

of us," said Ann Marie Scripko "We're looking forward to it... Our goal is to go again next year."

Amanda Oglesby: 732-557-5701; aoglesby@njpressmedia.com