

Robie' tracks trail to Tinseltown

Beagle, raised in Auburn, lands role in sci-fi movie

By Paul Cambra Journal staff writer



Julie Cheng, 50, of Auburn, recently raised a beagle named Robie who will make his big-screen debut next month in the movie "I Am Number Four." Robie was named for the Wendell T. Robie trail, a favorite spot for Julie and her dogs to run.

Tell us about Robie, soon to be the star of "I Am Number Four."

"Because of my exposure in the dog show world, an animal trainer saw him. Robie was the look they were after and they asked to purchase him. What an opportunity for Robie. They will work with him all day long. To be a dog and have that much attention given to you, that's a happy dog. They promised me he would always live with a trainer in a house with a family. Because of animal rights laws, they chose four dogs for the one movie role."

Well that fits right in with the movie's title, doesn't it?

"That's right. They chose him for the most difficult part, because the trainer said he was able to stay in one place for about 10 minutes. He has a role, he's not just in the background. I'm so excited they chose my dog to be in the movie. I'm going to go see it as soon as it opens."

Courtesy

Julie Cheng, 50, holds Robie, a beagle she raised who will soon appear in the movie "I Am Number Four." This photo, from last March, was taken the day the animal training company came to pick up Robie. "I knew this was my last day with him so I got a photo right before he left," Cheng said. "It will be exciting for me to see my boy on the big screen."

What do you like best about beagles?

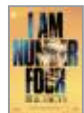
"They are the cutest breed out there and they don't lose their cuteness as adults. Their size is nice, too, easy to keep in the house. Plus, they're wash and wear, easy to keep clean. I want an active dog that will jog with me. Beagles have so much energy — they were bred to chase rabbits — they never tire out. They are a very sturdy breed."

You are taking part in the Golden Gate Kennel Club Dog Show later this month. How long have you been doing this?

"Five years. It's special because it's only once a year. It's a benched show, which means the dogs' owners have to be there eight hours a day to talk to the public. Thousands of people will go to this show and we sit with our dogs while they ask questions about the breed. We educate the public about the pros and cons of the breed."

Because of their even tempers and gentle dispositions, Beagles have become popular family pets. What advice would you give someone considering a beagle?

"If you want an off-leash dog, it's not for you. They are hounds so they'll follow their nose. They won't hesitate to take off after a rabbit, or chase a leaf. That's why people are always losing their beagles. They have to be securely fenced within a yard, or on a leash. They are very active — with a lot of energy — so they are good with children. But since they are pack animals, they want to be a part of the family. If you are going to be at work 10 hours a day, I would not suggest getting one."



Is it true they bark and howl a lot?

"They do if they have a reason to. If they sense wildlife in the area, or a dog passing by. They bark more than other dogs, but they won't if they are allowed to be with the family."

How have your dogs done at the competition?

"My dog Monty was ranked the No. 1 beagle in the nation in 2009. It was a 'conformation' show, which means they are judged on their build and structure and how they conform to the breed standard. And a beagle was bred to chase rabbits."

And because they were bred to chase rabbits, they are easily distracted by smells around them and therefore considered hard-to-train dogs. What has your experience been?

"They are very difficult, one of the harder breeds to train. They have been bred to follow their noses. I train them for the show ring, but I've had 10 years' experience doing it. I start at it as soon as they are born. For a first-time dog owner, I would suggest get help with training."

As a breed, they don't require a lot of exercise, but they are prone to weight gain. What do your dogs do for exercise?

"I would run every day with my dogs. In fact, I love the trails in Auburn so much that I named my dog Robie after the Wendell T. Robie trail. You bond with them when you exercise together, and a good dog is always a very tired dog. But they just need a good backyard. As long as you walk them every day they'll be fine."

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