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Mutt Strut 2026 Channels 'Friends' for 16th Annual Dog-Friendly 5K

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (February 16, 2026) — The 16th Annual Mutt Strut: Dog-Friendly 5K & Fun Run returns to Homewood Central Park on Saturday, April 11, 2026. Hosted by Hand in Paw's Junior Board, this year's event theme is inspired by the iconic sitcom Friends to help celebrate the organization's 30th anniversary.

Participants are encouraged to dress up in their best 1990s-inspired outfits to celebrate the friends — two-legged and four-legged alike — who have helped make Hand in Paw's mission a reality over the past three decades.

Mutt Strut is a family- and dog-friendly fundraiser that supports Hand in Paw's mission to improve human health and well-being through Animal-Assisted Therapy across Central Alabama and Tuscaloosa. Programs include visits to hospitals, schools, rehabilitation centers, senior living communities, and more. Funds raised help ensure these services remain accessible to people of all ages and abilities and free of charge to community partners.

"For 30 years, Hand in Paw has been all about connection — between people, animals, and our community," said Margaret Stinnett, Executive Director. "Mutt Strut is our biggest, most joyful celebration of that mission. This year's theme is a reminder that none of this work happens alone, and our friends and supporters are the ones who make this life-changing work possible."

In addition to the 5K and 1-mile fun run, Mutt Strut 2026 will feature dozens of vendors, live music, performances by Magic City Disco, sponsor activations, photo opportunities, and prizes for the fastest human, slowest dog, top fundraisers, and best Friends-inspired costume. Participants can register as individuals or teams and fundraise in advance to increase their impact.

Mutt Strut 2026 sponsors include: Creative Dog Training (Title Sponsor), 23Design, ABC 33/40, Caring Foundation of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, BluePearl Pet Hospital, Dogtopia, Long Lewis Ford Foundation, Dr. Susan and Rick Nelms in memory of Christopher, Top Dog Birmingham, Veterinary Specialists of Birmingham, The Bark Park, Coca-Cola Bottling Company

United, Deborah Michelle Photography, Exceptional Foundation, Compassionate Crossings, WillCapture Media, and Piggly Wiggly Homewood.

The event kicks off at 7:30 a.m. The 5K begins at 9 a.m. and the 1-mile fun run starts at 9:45 a.m. Online registration is open until Friday, April 10, with in-person registration available on race day.

Following the event, Good Dog Bar & Park will host the official Mutt Strut After Party beginning at 12 p.m. Enjoy live music, a kids' area, a food truck, and a safe, fenced space to relax with drinks while dogs play. Admission is free for registered Mutt Strut participants.

For more information, registration details, or sponsorship and vendor opportunities, visit handinpaw.org/muttstrut.

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Hand in Paw is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to improve human health and well-being through Animal-Assisted Therapy. Its professionally trained volunteer handler and animal therapy teams serve medical centers, schools, and human service organizations throughout North Central Alabama and Tuscaloosa — at no charge to community partners. Learn more at handinpaw.org.