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Dennis Cornell is still trying to come to grips with losing his job last month. But he is fortunate to have something to take his mind off things during his search for new employment.

Cornell and his wife, Natalie, are founders of the Hot Diggity Dogs Flyball Club in Belleville.

While his wife continues going to work each day in Amherstview, Cornell has kept busy organizing the club's second annual 'flyball showcase' (a mini-tournament or demonstration to give the general public an idea of what flyball competition is all about) as well as its first sanctioned tournament in May for other enthusiasts from across Ontario.

The showcase event runs Sunday, March 23, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Sir James Whitney's gymnasium. The club's first tournament May 3-4 at the Dick Ellis Rink will bring in competitors from the Greater Toronto and Collingwood areas and various points in between.

"It's something I can direct my energies into during this crucial point in my life ... I would be going up the wall if I didn't have them," said the 52-year-old Glendale Road resident.

Cornell spent the past two years with Maxtech Technology as a dispatcher for its direct sales machines program. A corporate restructuring left him without a job in mid-February.

"I have no ill feelings against Maxtech. It's just one of those things," he said.

"It's upsetting because everyone who is capable of working needs a job to make ends meet. But I'm confident I will find something. I'm not a quitter."

He has always held a job since high school.

The Belleville native and Moira Secondary School graduate worked for the Parks and Recreation Department for eight years. He was on the ice maintenance crews at both Memorial Arena and Dick Ellis Rink.

He left the parks board to pursue other employment interests until joining Maxtech two years ago.

The Cornells have been married for 12 years. They both love dogs and have owned several dogs over the years. But it was a seven-year-old black spoodle, Daisy, that convinced the couple to start the Belleville Flyball Club in 1999.

"She enjoyed the sport of flyball and we thought Belleville was ready for a flyball club," he said.

They got their first taste of flyball in the mid-1990s with the Napanee club. They enjoyed it so much that they began their Belleville club initially with five owners and six dogs.

The club now boasts 22 members, including teachers, business owners, welding inspectors, dog groomers, a Loyalist College teacher living in Peterborough and even a Carleton University professor who travels here for the weekly practices and attends tournaments.

So what is flyball?

It's like a relay race for dogs, Cornell replies.

Each competing dog has to go over a series of four jumps, then hit a flyball box which triggers a tennis ball to shoot out. The dog catches the ball and has to carry the ball back over the four jumps and across the start/finish line before dropping the ball.

The 100-foot course takes dogs anywhere from five to seven seconds to complete. Teams consist of four dogs each and the fastest combined time determines the winners.

While dogs race through the course, their handlers must remain behind the start/finish line — albeit cheering them on.

Cornell said the club offers beginner's classes to train any interest dog and owner in the sport of flyball. Weekly indoor practices are held for members.

"I get a lot of enjoyment out of the club," he said. "It's very satisfying to see a 'green' dog come into the gym and complete its beginner's class and basically go on to become one of our faster dogs in the club."

Cornell said the club gives dog owners "something new" to do with their four-legged friends.

"Owners can channel their dog's energy through flyball," he said. "I get a lot of satisfaction and enjoyment in seeing my dog do the course to the best of her ability."

Cornell said the local "recreational" club will accept any dog that is capable of doing flyball. Breed doesn't matter, as long as they are not mean-spirited.

"We're not out to break any records, just to provide a good time for the handlers and their dogs."

Besides Daisy, Cornell has two other dogs. He has owned Amos, a rescue Greyhound, for the past four years and has trained him to become No. 5 in his breed in North America flyball competition.

Their other dog, Domino, a Whippet, will begin his formal training this summer for flyball.

Cornell enjoys socializing with other club members, who have become a close knit group because of the sport. Club members travel to about 14 flyball tournaments a year, stretching from Belleville to Sarnia and even Michigan.

While Natalie does all the training for the club, Cornell is responsible for all the equipment, including jumps, rubber mats and flyball boxes.

He uses a special trailer to truck all the required equipment to tournaments and public demonstrations.

"We just enjoy the sport so much that we want to get the information out there that there are different things that owners can do with their dogs," he said.

"Flyball is a good alternative to taking your dog for a walk."