

Local News

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Shinto shrine offers blessings for pets

By Simplicio Paragas
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Ryuji Hoshino, far right, and Jon Lower bless Kuro, who came with owner Hanako Hata and her children.

Some will come with their sunglasses and athletic shoes. Others will come in their Sunday best. And a couple may even come with a "body shield." It will be an unlikely gathering of feathered, furred and shelled friends, all with one goal: To be blessed.

On June 1, owners will bring their four-legged and winged family members to a special blessing in observance of "Pet Appreciation Week." From 10 a.m.-2 p.m., pet owners can have their babies blessed at the Hawaii Kotohira Jinsha-Hawaii Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine at 1239 Olomea Street, off Houghtailing next to Honolulu Ford.

"This is our fourth year doing this," says event staff member Irene Takizawa, who will bring her American bulldog Morton, bull terrier Igor and black lab-retriever Asher to be blessed that day. "It's the traditional Shinto blessing and it's performed in the traditional way."

A 6-foot diameter ring made of ti leaves will serve as the ceremonial "passage of rites," with dogs, cats, birds, fish, turtles, hamsters and their owners walking through the circle.

"This is an 1,800-year-old ritual," Takizawa says. "Pets and their owners will actually do like an infinity, figure-eight through the circles then proceed to the steps of the shrine where a priest will be waiting to say a prayer and to ring the suzu (bell) over the pet's head."



Fortunately, no one has been bitten, Takizawa quips.

No reservations are needed and people can amble in with their pets anytime during the four hours.

"People will bring their hamsters and cats in cages, dogs on leashes and some birds will be harnessed in a body shield so they don't fly away," Takizawa says. "Pets are being blessed for their health and longevity."

It's also a recognition and show of appreciation for their compassion and unconditional love."