

Record-setting Great Dane set to do Tucson proud on 'Oprah'

Phil Villarreal Arizona Daily Star | Posted: Monday, February 22, 2010 12:00 am



Long live King George of Tucson.

The 43-inch-tall Great Dane has seized the Guinness World Records titles of Tallest Dog and Tallest Dog Ever.

He's also living large in another sense, surely ready to add to his 20,000 Facebook friends, by appearing on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" today, in an appearance he and master Dave Nasser taped last week in Chicago.

Nasser said George held court with aplomb, shaking off surprise applause from the audience - the crowd had been asked not to clap - then took a seat on a couch while Nasser answered Oprah's questions for about two minutes.

The whirlwind of Guinness' record setting and Oprah's invitation left Nasser breathless.

"I'm still dealing with that, to be honest," Nasser said, reiterating that his quest to get George recognition is all about "sharing this beautiful animal with other people."

Nasser said he's been contacted by other A-list daytime talk shows, and won't rule out more appearances. George already has generated such a national following that about 100 people awaited him as he disembarked from a plane in Chicago Tuesday.

"We don't know how these people heard about it because we weren't supposed to tell anybody we were going to be on Oprah until the show airs," Nasser said. "But there were a ton of people, all with cameras in their hand, and they formed a semicircle around him. Oprah's people told me that George was a bigger star - and I don't know, this is just what they told me - than if Brad Pitt were to come in the house."

Guinness officially - and secretively - gave George his records on Feb. 15 - although not officially until today - and "Oprah" producers asked all parties, including the Star, to keep the announcement quiet until today.

Nasser said the record and the "Oprah" booking happened in a whirlwind.

George usurps the former title- holder, rival 42 1/4-inch Titan, owned by Diana Taylor of San Diego. Guinness named Titan the world's tallest dog on Nov. 12.

Before Titan, the record was vacant for three months after the death of the Grass Valley, Calif., Great Dane named Gibson, who held the record from Aug. 31, 2004, until his death on Aug. 7.

Nasser and his friends, public relations experts Paul O'Rourke and Dana Murray, didn't get their application to Guinness in time to take the title before Taylor got Titan's application in.

Meanwhile, "Oprah" producers got into the picture late last year, inquiring about having George on the show whether or not he earned the Guinness title. Camera crews visited to film Nasser and his family interacting with George at their home.

Nasser asked the producers to hold off until Guinness reviewed his application and investigated, which it did last week, sending representative Jamie Panas from New York to witness **veterinarian Jim Boulay measure George at Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson**, on the northwest side.



"I was awestruck upon meeting George. Just seeing the sheer size of this dog was fascinating, even though I've met a variety of unique record holders of all sizes during my career here," Panas said.

"Seeing George sit in a chair like a human, sleep on his own queen-size bed but genuinely not realize how different he is, was really fun to watch."

Nasser and his wife, Christine, flew out Tuesday, sitting beside George in the plane for the four-hour flight. Originally the show had offered to fly George and the Nassers first class on American Airlines, but Nasser and George went on a plane Monday night and verified that George was too big to fit there. Instead, they sat in the bulkhead - the partitions that divide first class from the rest of the passengers - for the duration of the flight. George rested on three seats.

"His bladder is so strong that four hours was nothing for him," Nasser said. "Maybe he was slightly nervous when he got on, but he was fine from there."

Once in Chicago, the Nassers stayed at a suite in the ritzy Omni Chicago Hotel, which provided George with his own twin bed.

Nasser said the segment - taped Wednesday after a brief walk-through Tuesday - begins with a "B-roll" introduction that shows the family in Tucson, followed by George's appearance.

"He was not skittish at all," Nasser said proudly. The owner, though, said he's wary of the media barrage that is about to descend on him and his pet.

"I think maybe once we get through the next week, the media blitz, I'd like to quiet things down a little bit," said Nasser, a Realtor. "We obviously can't keep up this pace. It's impossible because it becomes a full-time job for you."

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