

Teaching DOGS new tricks

Vietnam vet gets pets and owners ready for therapy program

BY ASHLEY JOHNSON
For The Sun

The patient was obviously in a lot of pain, but that changed once she put her arm around a golden retriever named Spud.

"She was crying really hysterically and was so distraught," said Spud's owner, Wendy Yellin. "Spud went on the bed with her. You could just feel how the tension left her."

As a volunteer for nine years with the Animal-Assisted Therapy program at Edward Hospital, Yellin has seen how dogs can provide comfort and relief to hurting people. Although dogs may be ideal companions by nature,

working in a hospital setting requires a level of obedience and focus that only comes with proper training. To prepare their canines, owners such as Yellin turn to longtime dog trainer Frank Brader.

Lessons in discipline

Brader, who lost half his left arm in a mortar attack during the Vietnam War, has been training dogs for more than 30 years. He runs Haus von Brader Dog Obedience Training, and teaches courses in Naperville at the VFW post on West Jackson Avenue and in North Riverside.

The discipline dogs learn makes them good candidates for the therapy program as



Dog trainer Frank Brader, who operates Haus von Brader Dog Obedience Training, sets Lucky the rabbit down in front of a row of dogs during a training class held this past April at the VFW in Naperville. | PHOTOS BY MARIANNE MATHER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA

well as the American Kennel Club's Canine Good Citizen program, Brader said. Among several skills, dogs learn to stay, sit on command and to become desensitized to distractions.

"In our classes, we set the bar real high," Brader said. "There is no such thing as you can't teach an old dog new tricks."

He recommends putting puppies in obedience training at 4 months. But his program is as much about the owners as the dogs. As he put it, "I'm not training dogs; I'm train-

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ing people to train dogs." That means owners must have the patience and commitment to work with their pets.

Training therapy dogs

According to Patty Kaplan, director of Animal-Assisted Therapy at Edward Hospital,

dogs provide patients with a diversion from their illness. "We also find it's a huge stress reliever for families," she said.

The program started in 2002 with 15 dog/owner teams and now has almost 100. They visit patients every day of the week.

DID YOU KNOW?

Over the years, Frank Brader has trained many different types of dogs, including Spuds MacKenzie, the bull terrier who became the Bud Light dog in the 1980s.

Many of the dogs completed Brader's training.

"I think he's a top-notch trainer," Kaplan said. "I think he understands dogs and dog behaviors, and he's been a very good partner for us."

Yellin credits Brader with taming her "wild" year-old golden retriever, Jackie-O. After just one year training with Brader, Jackie-O passed the rigorous temperament testing necessary to participate in the therapy program.

Brader's talent was on display during a recent advanced class in Naperville. With 19 dogs standing in two lines, he tossed a ball down the center. None of them chased after it. He also put a live rabbit in front of each dog. Some gazed intently and sniffed the rabbit, but not a single dog pounced.

That self-restraint is important for therapy dogs because they have to resist food and other distractions in the hospital.

SEE TRICKS, PAGE 35



Frank Brader laughs after making animal noises to try and distract the dogs in his class in April at the VFW in Naperville. | MARIANNE MATHER-SUN-TIMES MEDIA



A talking Elmo is placed in front of 18-month-old Riley, an Irish setter, during obedience training this past April in Naperville. The dogs learn to ignore the distractions around them during Frank Brader's Haus von Brader Dog Obedience Training held at the VFW in Naperville.

Dogs graduated from obedience training, thanks to Frank Brader

Live rabbits, toy battery-powered bunnies, bouncing balls and aluminum pie plates didn't distract these 10 well-behaved dogs, all graduates of Haus von Brader Dog Obedience Training.

Frank Brader, a Marine who lost an arm in Vietnam, has been dog training for three decades. He let PN in on something at recent spring graduation ceremonies. During the 9-week course, he's really training dog owners.

During graduation exercises, ten dogs, purebreds and mixed breeds, passed many tests. Some of the problems solved included housebreaking, barking, chewing, jumping and understanding commands such as heel, stay, come, sit, down and more.

The next Haus von Brader Dog Obedience Training Course begins July 13 at the Judd Kendall VFW Post 3873.

INFO: www.DogTrainingByFrank.com

