

PET PRIDE

DOWN GIRL! BAD MANNERS GIVE DOGS A BAD NAME

Now that you've fallen in love with your new pooch, please teach her the basic commands that could save her life. A dog that will sit and stay under any circumstances can be rescued from most dangerous situations. Out-of-control dogs are a liability and a nuisance to others; not everyone appreciates being accosted by a leaping Labrador.

There are many methods of dog training and classes galore for you and your pal, though the trend these days is toward nonviolent systems that reward rather than punish. Events for dogs and their owners to practice their obedience and other skills, such as herding competitions, are increasingly popular. Even the tiniest dogs can participate in these trials, and they provide great opportunities for you and Phideaux to bond.

"Training is about learning each other's language," says Dr. Mary Lee Nitschke, an animal behavior therapist and owner of the Animal School in Southwest Portland. "Puppy Class has saved so many dogs," she claims, noting that unresolved behavior problems are the main reasons dogs end up at the pound.

Starting at about 10 weeks of age, puppies can be trained in basic skills, and if you want to start even earlier, Nitschke will make house calls. "Biting is one thing that's important to deal with early," she says, adding that truly aggressive dogs may need to attend her Growl Class, where she uses group therapy to get such dogs out of your face and under control.

Other specialized classes she offers include: House Manners,



PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

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which she calls "civilizing the family pet"; Good Neighbor Class; and Play Class, where graduates of other classes can drop in for supervised play groups.

"Play is one of the most important things in a dog's life," Nitschke asserts, and her facility has a large, safe space with toys galore to entice and enliven even the most dedicated couch hound.

Perhaps you have a multipet, multispecies household with complex behavior challenges—another case perfect for a house

call. As a professor of (human) psychology at Linfield College who specializes in interspecies communication, Nitschke is uniquely trained to help. "What I do with my clients is brief, solution-focused therapy. I consider the whole family system—some of them just have more legs or hair," she says, agreeing that it's just as important for us to learn our pet's language and cues as it is for them to learn ours.

She also believes the very best reason to have a pet is "for the health of the human." Studies have proven that people who share their lives with animals live longer and have fewer health problems.

Dr. Nitschke is a pioneer in teaching nursing students at Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland how to use animals as partners in health care, an idea that has evolved from pet therapy programs.

But the best reward for training your dog is that you can take him almost anywhere. If you have an enlightened employer, even to work. Research shows that animals in the workplace reduce stress and facilitate the socialization of people. Uptight, overworked executives have been known to melt and coo upon meeting a poodle in the elevator.

Animal School is located in the Multnomah area of Southwest Portland. Call (503) 977-1385 for more information.

—Oriana Green

Different Drivers. Different Roads. One Car.

