

Helping Challenging Dogs Stay in Homes

Written by MC SPCA

Thursday, 18 February 2010 09:36

Learning canine couth

TINTON FALLS, N.J. □ It's a pretty simple equation.

Helping families keep their pooches with less than perfect manners, PLUS making it easier to for training-deprived shelter dogs to be adopted, EQUALS landing more dogs in homes and less dying in shelters.

National animal welfare organization [Best Friends Animal Society](#) has developed a program that matches highly qualified dog trainers with shelters and families whose dogs have behavioral issues.

Mike Harmon is the manager of Best Friends' [Community Training Partner](#) (CTP) program and Sam Wike, a certified professional dog trainer and behavior specialist, was the first dog trainer accepted into program. Wike is the lead trainer at [Purr'n Pooch](#), a top-notch private pet boarding/training/grooming facility.

Several months ago Wike took Rufus, a dog from Best Friends Animal Society who basically needed a "finishing school" environment in order to be ready to be adopted. Dick Palazzo, the owner of Purr'n Pooch and a long time trainer and behavior specialist, the Purr'n Pooch staff and Wike worked with the handsome Lab/Husky mix who has finished his training and is just waiting for the perfect family.

But Wike is the self-described "guinea pig" for the program.

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“Mike keeps coming up with ideas. He said since I live close to the [Monmouth County SPCA](#) (Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), since I was already volunteering there, and since he knew this shelter wanted to do more to help dogs, that it just seemed logical that we develop a training program for their dogs.”

Ursula Goetz, who had been the executive director of the Monmouth SPCA for the last 20 years, was thrilled when Harmon and Wike approached her with the idea for the Monmouth County SPCA/ Purr’n Pooch Pilot Shelter Training Program.

“I know Dick Palazzo has been a long-time financial supporter and cheerleader of the Monmouth County SPCA. Sam and Dick are available to our adopters, our staff and our volunteers to step up the training for dogs,” Goetz said.

Harmon said: “This program is a great example of how a community can make a difference by pooling their resources and working together. Our goal is to showcase this model program to other communities and shelters across the country, giving them the resources they need to save lives and reduce the number of homeless pets.”

There are several components to the joint New Jersey program—owner surrenders, staff training and shelter dog behavioral modification. The main goal is to lower the number of dogs returned to shelters and to counsel people considering relinquishing their dogs because of behavior issues.

When a family comes into the shelter to turn in their dog, a staff counselor sits down with them, and talks through the reasons the family is considering giving up their pet. Owners then are offered the option of training and behavior modification for their dogs, which is funded through the Best Friends program. In addition, Wike and Palazzo conduct handling and behavior education with the shelter staff to help them hone their skills.

“We started this January working with the staff and we’ve also initiated doggy play groups with the shelter dogs,” Wike said. “The play groups help the dogs to learn how to interact appropriately with other dogs. The dogs burn off excess energy romping with each other and it’s a great showcase for their personalities when potential adopters come by the shelter,” Wike said.

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Goetz, who just retired and handed over the leadership of the Monmouth County SPCA to Laurie Garrison, looks back with pride on the major strides the SPCA has made in its care of dogs and cats. "Most people still don't realize that the shelters of today are not like the pounds of 20 years ago," Goetz said.

"This partnership is phenomenal. Through everyone's dedication, we can save more lives. We can do amazing things for the animals," Goetz said.

Garrison, the new executive director of Monmouth County SPCA said: "I am very excited about working with Best Friends and Purr n' Pooch. The Monmouth County SPCA's goal is to take a leadership role in making New Jersey a place where every adoptable pet has a happy home. The only way to make that happen is with teamwork, and I can't wait to work together to make New Jersey a place where every animal is treated with respect, kindness and love."