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A Puppy for Christmas?

By Cathy Tyson



Bonnie Brown-Cali

"Would you let a goat run free in your house?" said Bonnie Brown-Cali with Dog Dynamics, an Orinda based master dog trainer. "The number one problem dog owners have is underestimating the amount of physical and mental energy it takes to take care of a puppy and adolescent dog. A puppy is still mentally a puppy from 18 months to 3 - 4 years, depending on the breed." Good advice for families contemplating getting a pet as a holiday present. Considering your pooch will be a member of the family for many years to come, it's wise to start them out on the right paw.

Lucky for Lamorinda residents, Brown-Cali teaches Puppy Head Start, Basic Obedience, Off-Leash Preparation, Rally and other classes at the Orinda Community Center. At a recent class, a fluffy toy Australian shepherd, an energetic Schnauzer, a very large, very mellow Newfoundland, and a yappy Cavalier King Charles Spaniel were among the attendees trying to learn behavior basics. It's a surreal experience, adults looking for some guidance, and hoping their dog isn't a complete embarrassment and especially doesn't make a mess on the Community Center floor. Classes are non-competitive and work toward building a strong bond between the dogs and their humans'. Not surprisingly, most "students" from Puppy Head Start continue on to Basic Obedience and beyond.

"Puppies learn from you every time you put your hands on them so it's a good idea to begin training as soon as you can. Allow them to have off-leash experience with other dogs in a safe and organized puppy class, and then continue on to help them learn their basic manners," noted Brown-Cali, who also offers private instruction and day training.

"Bonnie is outstanding. I have a difficult, highly reactive two-year-old terrier-

mix" said Debra Taraskewich, who recently finished an eight week class with Brown-Cali. "Bonnie was really good at explaining why she wants us to do things in a specific order, making the lessons perfectly clear. Skipper still has his 'reactive' moments, but at least now I know what to do to calm him down."

Brown-Cali learned the tools of the trade first hand training her own dogs, and then as a trainer for search and rescue teams at the Contra Costa County Sheriff Department. She's also volunteered for California Association of Rescue Dogs and the California Office of Emergency Services.

Now in addition to her classes and private instruction, Brown-Cali works for Paws with a Cause, an organization that trains service dogs for the disabled, and for Working Dogs for Conservation Foundation.

New classes begin January 8 in Orinda. She offers one last training tidbit: the holidays can be hazardous for puppies and adult dogs with chocolate Santas and tails that can knock over burning candles. Make sure your home is safe for your dog to be in, and when left alone place your dog in a safe spot where temptation and accidents cannot occur." For more information go to www.dogdynamics.org or www.cityoforinda.org.

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