

THE RIVERTOWNS Enterprise

The Hometown Newspaper
of Hastings-on-Hudson,
Dobbs Ferry, Ardsley
and Irvington

VOLUME 41, NUMBER 35 • NOVEMBER 25, 2016

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

New K9 program offers a training win-win at CV

By Kris DiLorenzo

DOBBS FERRY — Little Tuggie is acting bossy, graceful Lily is contemplating walking up a ramp, mysterious Zena is observing from the sidelines, and party girl Tess is outside staring through the window, miffed that she's missing the action.

Last week, these four rescue dogs — Lily and Tuggie from the Paws Crossed animal shelter in Elmsford, Tess from a private client, and Zena, belonging to trainer Adam Mallin — were enrolled in obedience training through a new program, Canine Rescue & Rehab (K9 R&R), at The Children's Village in Dobbs Ferry. What's different from most dog-training schools is that here, the residents — all adolescents from troubled backgrounds — are the trainers.

Under Mallin's expert direction, students work in different hour-and-a-half shifts, six days a week, learning to help the abandoned animals become better socialized, and thereby more adoptable. The program has been so successful that some dogs are ready for adoption in a couple of days, so the canine turnover is constant. On the day the Enterprise visited, Tuggie (Tugalina) the pug mix, Lily the hound mix, Zena the black German Shepherd, and goldendoodle Tess (a cross between a golden retriever and a poodle) were being put through their paces by Mallin and 13-year-old Lloyd of Queens, a budding singer/songwriter.

Mallin, a 53-year-old Mount Kisco resident who has been training dogs since 2009, was formerly a trainer for ECAD (Educated Canines Assisting with Disabilities), the Connecticut-based nonprofit organization that trains service dogs. When ECAD ended its programs at several Westchester residential treatment facilities, including CV, it had been operating at the Dobbs Ferry facility for 18 years. Mallin approached CV with his idea to start K9 R&R on the campus.

"I love training dogs," Mallin told the Enterprise, "but to me, the key piece is working with the students. We want to create a therapeutic experience for the students that will focus on their needs, and secondarily, the dogs' needs."

He and Lia Schwartz, CV's chief of staff, who was also an ECAD trainer, formulated a plan for the new program, and in July, Schwartz approached Paws Crossed, which succeeded the shelter Pets Alive, and officially opened on Sept. 17, about a partnership. By September, the program was up and running. Out of approximately 47 eligible students who applied, 30 were chosen for the program.

One principle Mallin tries to instill in his young trainers is that a dog's behavior often reflects that of the human with whom it is interacting. "I learned that dogs learn best with body movement, and so do humans," Lloyd explained. "If you go up to a person, and you're walking like this," he demonstrated folding his arms across his chest, "they're going to think you're mad."

So if you walk up to a dog like that, they're going to think you're mad."

Mallin gave an example: "If a student has just had a ruckus in their cottage and they're in a bad mood, the dog won't go near them; it's hesitant, scared of them. What is the dog reacting to? What happened before. The dog starts to respond as the student starts to decompress."

Mallin employs what he calls "instinctive training," which mirrors how a female dog trains its pups. "It's communication, not smacking the dog around or screaming."

The students soon learn to monitor their own behavior, establish connections with the dogs, and get them to cooperate — and vice-versa. Students and dogs all arrive at CV with any coping mechanism they have been using, Mallin explained. "Dogs are experts at training people," he said. "They have figured out how we think: the whole cute factor is how it works."



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Lily responds to a command from 13-year-old Lloyd on Nov. 18.



TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

Adam Mallin works with Tuggie on Nov. 18.

Zena, who responds to a multitude of commands — from "Sit" to "Bring your leash" to barking in response to a particular hand signal — has mastered the art of cute. While Lloyd coaxed Lily to overcome her fear and walk up a ramp to the top of a dog crate, Zena stayed in her "down" position, lying on her stomach and whimpering sweetly for attention.

Patience is one of the biggest lessons for the trainers-in-training. "Some of these dogs here taught me to be patient," Lloyd affirmed. "Sometimes you're telling the dog to come, and then it tests you. It just looks at you, and I go, 'OK, you still won't come.' You gotta have pa-

tience." Persistence is the other important quality for a trainer to have. "I would say, no matter how hard the dogs are to teach, you're never supposed to give up," Lloyd reflected. "Even if the dog shows their butt to you, you're still going to have to not give up."

"The dog is always trying to teach the student," Mallin added. "A very important thing for the kids is for the dog to trust them." He measures the program's success not only in terms of how many dogs are adopted, but also in how the students feel: "These kids walk around with their chests puffed out; they see their success with the dogs."

Certain students are chosen for internships onsite at Paws Crossed, where they learn to care for dogs in other ways. Lloyd gave an example of a chore he recently completed. "One day I went there, we cleaned out the whole locker, and we had to put the dog foods in order," he recalled. "There were so many dog foods in that locker, and we had to order them from expired to not expired, and the dates — oh, gosh. It was a big locker, too. There was so much food!"

Last week, Lloyd taught Lily how long she had to sit before she would get a treat, convinced Zena to bring him her leash and to heel, urged Tess into her crate, kept Tuggie from being distracted by other dogs and noise around her, and demonstrated how to get a dog's attention so she would come to him on command.

The program's results are gratifying for Mallin, who sees the program expanding to add another component. "Our goal in part is to get students to the level of training that they can assist me in running an obedience course where anyone in Dobbs Ferry can bring their dogs for training, for a donation to Children's Village. It will start when the students get to a level where they're interacting as service providers to customers. We're aiming at early next year."

The cute factor still works on Lloyd, who's sure he will have a dog of his own someday. He described an incident from the day before the Enterprise's visit: "Adam had Tugalina, and Lopez, one of the other students, had Lily, and he was sitting down in a chair, she was like this" — he imitated her sitting posture — "and then Adam walked up to Lopez and they were speaking, then Tugalina and Lily started hugging each other. That was so cute! I wished I had my phone; I would've taken their picture."