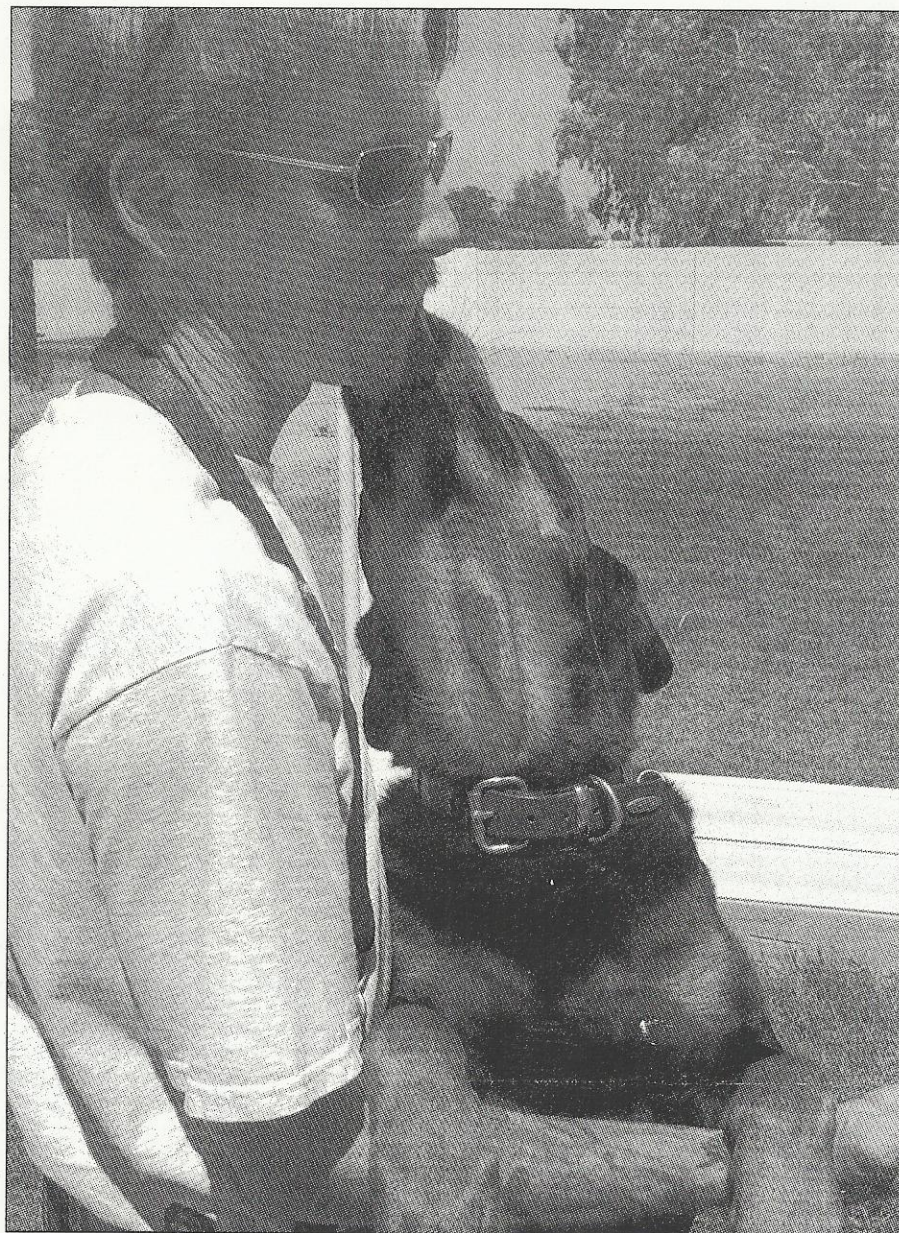


Chandler dog trainer takes 'ruff' spots out of pooches



JIM POULIN/THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Dog trainer Dave Namesnik gets a little affection from four-legged friend Brach, a Rottweiler.

BY ANNE ROBERTSON

adrobertson@bizjournals.com

About three years ago, Dave Namesnik was hired to train, or perhaps cure, a female German Shepherd in Mesa who had tried to kill her own puppies. The dog had to be walked at 2 a.m. with two leashes, a pinch collar and muzzle by her owner, to avoid running into other people who it might have been tempted to attack.

"The shepherd was stone-cold aggressive and drastic measures were taken to avoid harm to others," says Namesnik, a Chandler dog trainer who started his obedience and animal behavior modification business, Pawsitive Pals, in 1994.

"The shepherd only liked its own human family and dog food," he says.

Within three weeks Namesnik could touch her without "getting my hand bitten off," and within two months the once-dangerous canine could be handled on a leash by a 12-year-old boy who was not a family member.

"I taught the people how to handle the dog differently," Namesnik said. "That's an extreme example, but with the shepherd and others like her, you have to take the dog out of the alpha, or dominant, position in the home.

"A lot of people allow their animals to manipulate others and run the house," he says. "The owners had been ready to put her down."

Namesnik specializes in problem-solving, and runs his operations out of his East Valley farmhouse. He travels to the houses of his clients for at-home obedience training of their pets, then hosts group classes at the farmhouse as follow-up to the training. Group classes are the second phase of training, when owners and pets come together to teach the animals more socialization.

One of the most common problems that people have with their pets is the tendency to project human emotions and values onto the animals.

"Dogs don't look at the world the way we do," he says.

Aggression in dogs is just as often fear-based as it is dominance-based, Namesnik

■ OFFBEAT

said. He frequently works with dogs that have been adopted from shelters by families hoping to save them. Many have suffered abuse at the hands of previous owners.

He cited the four-pound mini fox terrier, "Bimbo," who had been abused by its previous owners and "was afraid of everything." Namesnik taught her trust through repetition of commands and kindness.

"Last time I saw her in group lessons, she was trotting next to a couple of mastiffs and Rottweilers, the big boys," he quips.

Namesnik acquired his animal touch growing up on a Valley Arabian horse farm, chock full of dogs and barn cats.

"My mom bred and showed dogs when I was a kid," he says. "Having lived with and worked with so many animals, it was natural to do this."

He developed his technique, he said, through years of trial and error. He also started by studying the Kohler Method, which is the source of most modern dog training, according to Namesnik.

"Once I got into the business, I found that there were dogs nobody else would touch," Namesnik says.

Namesnik gets a lot of his clients through referrals, primarily from veterinarians, previous clients, groomers and other trainers. He also works with rescue organizations.

He trains about 300 dogs annually and charges \$470 for a training package, which spans up to seven weeks, followed by group lessons.

He also has penned a book, "Each Comes With a Halo," a collection of dog and animal stories, that will come out next spring.

Namesnik's passion for what he does helps him face down some of the perils that go with training obedience-challenged pooches.

"I'm not getting rich, but I'm doing what I love," he says. "There is lots of warm and fuzzy to it, and bumps and bruises, too."

■ GET CONNECTED

Pawsitive Pals: 602-259-9310