

## Local 'dog whisperer' helps out pet owners

BRIAN MORELLI • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • FEBRUARY 2, 2009

Cooper loves to love, and Cooper loves attention.

But the shaggy golden retriever is a bit too ambitious in his quest for human affection.

That's why owners Barbara Vinograde and Aaron Silander called in a specialist.

"We just wanted to be able to have people over," Vinograde said.

Cooper, Vinograde and Silander began working with Stacey Pilling, a military-schooled dog trainer. Pilling recently relocated to Coralville and launched a dog training service called Sarvara Canine Consultants.

Pilling also is starting a free monthly dog training seminar with Dennis Cowles, veterinarian at the Coralville Animal Clinic. The first seminar, called "Choosing a dog," is at 7 p.m. Feb. 18 at the Coralville Recreation Center.

The seminars are free and will be the third Wednesday of each month.

Pilling always has been a dog person and when the option arose to work with and train military dogs, she took it. Twenty years later, Pilling still is putting her connection with animals to work.

"We heard Stacey was a local dog whisperer," Vinograde said of how she settled on Pilling.

Pilling uses positive reinforcement, such as treats or praise. Cooper, a 4-year-old rescued dog, feeds off the praise, so they normally don't even need treats as a reward.

Pilling's training sessions typically are once a week. The sessions are based on the needs of the dog and the desires of the owner. Some dogs need obedience training. Others are more complicated and have issues with aggression or separation anxiety. Some owners just want help choosing the right dog for them, which also is something Pilling offers.

Cooper is an easier case. Eager to please, this dog just needs to work on his commands like sitting, staying, heeling and not jumping up on people, she said.

Cooper's improvement was immediately noticeable after the first lesson, Silander said. Even walking through the neighborhood, neighbors commented that Cooper seemed better behaved and happier, Silander said.

"It's really been about us taking leadership roles," Silander said. "Dogs are pack animals, so they need someone to take the leadership."

Pilling said she works with all dogs, but the key is to teach owners the skills they need to teach their dogs.

"I haven't come across a problem I haven't been able to solve," Pilling said.



Press-Citizen / John Richard

Dog trainer Stacey Pilling works with Cooper, a golden retriever, Wednesday at a home in Iowa City.

### **MORE INFORMATION**

• For more information about Sarvara Canine Consultants, contact Stacey Pilling at 906-370-3706 or e-mail [sapilling@yahoo.com](mailto:sapilling@yahoo.com).