

THE PLAIN DEALER

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Teaching kids kindness to animals

Dog trainer uses gentleness as his method

"No hitting, no kicking, no shocking, no shaking, no jerking of dogs and no leash corrections" is Paul Owens' formula for training dogs.

Owens, a former Clevelander who makes his home in Burbank, Calif., believes not only in training dogs with nonviolent methods, but in teaching children to be gentle with animals.

ABOUT ANIMALS



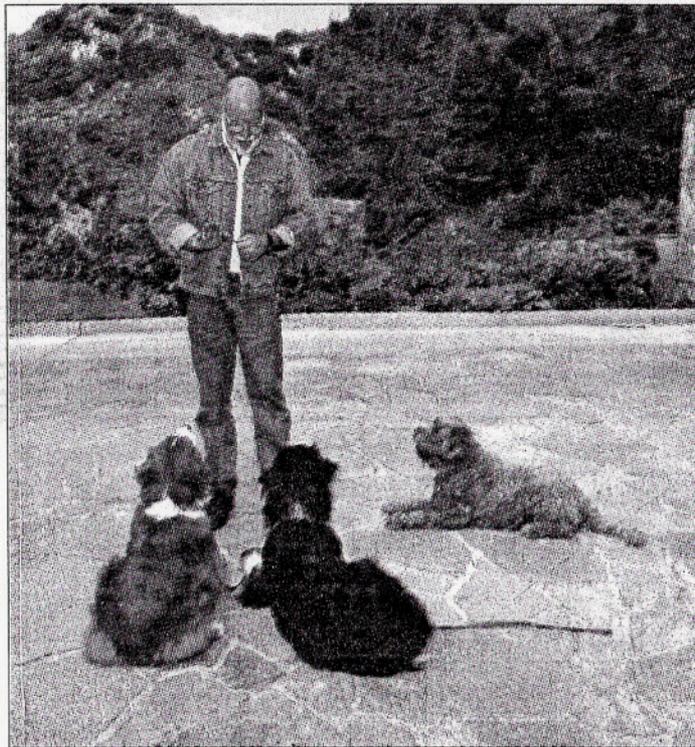
By Suzanne Hively

its fourth printing, and to visit his family.

"You can get off-lead behavior reliability without having to hit kick, jerk, shock or shake [the dog]," Owens said.

His motive is to prevent future violence to animals or humans. "There is a direct link between how we treat our animals and how we treat each other," he said.

"My purpose in writing the book was twofold," Owens said. "To make scientific training principles fun, easy to use and accessible to everyone and to reinforce the common-sense notion that training dogs with nonviolence helps us as human beings."



COURTESY PAUL OWENS

Paul Owens with his Portuguese water dog, Molly, at right and two canine friends in a training class.

owners how to train their dogs and he teaches one-on-one sessions with the more difficult dogs. "No aggressive dogs are permitted in group training," he said.

Owens also conducts a Paws for Peace volunteer program in which children in some of Los Angeles' poorest schools learn to interact with dogs.

"Children in grades three to six are still open to finding out about

the world," he said. "For some of them, it is their first chance to be themselves in a noncompetitive way and to practice unconditional love."

Ten children per class spend one hour a day after school for 20 days learning to care for 10 dogs which Owens and his three assistants bring from a Los Angeles shelter.

"The children come from homes in which they are unlikely

to have had any positive experiences with dogs," Owens said. "They learn to train them, clean them up and clean up after them."

Each day the dogs are returned to the shelter. At the end of the program, the dogs are adopted. However, the children are not allowed to adopt the dogs, because, although they have learned to be kind to animals, their home environment usually is not the best for the dogs.

Finding a trainer

No certification or licensing is required for trainers and methods of training vary. Positive training is desirable, but "everyone has a different definition of 'positive' training," Owens said. "Mine is 'no choke or prong collars.'" (He uses head halters.) Owens suggested these tips for finding a good trainer:

- Sit in and audit the class.
- See if the trainer practices what he or she preaches. Does the trainer have dogs that are the end result of his or her training? Dogs should obey commands because they are enjoying themselves and not because of fear.
- Look for a class in which positive methods are used and the class is fun, rather than military style.
- Be aware that a good trainer who doesn't know the answer to a question will say so, then find the answer.

"I meet very few people who, when they see a dog being jerked on a leash, don't cringe inside and wish there was another way to do it," Owens said.

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