

ANIMAL TRAINING

Who you gonna call? Bark Busters

By William Fouts

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Gus has a way of making visitors feel unwelcome. The 5-year-old dachshund barks incessantly whenever anyone other than his family enters their home.

Gus owners, Jason and Melissa Llewellen of Fishers, say Gus' behavior makes it difficult for them to have family and friends over to visit. It all but spoils Jason's weekly poker game.

"For the first 20 minutes it's just nonstop barking," Jason Llewellen said.

The Llewellens had considered giving Gus away. However, they decided to give Gus another chance. They called Deborah Harlen instead. Harlen is a Bark Busters franchise owner. Bark Busters is an in-home dog training service. Founded in Australia

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TRIBUTES / WEATHER



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Deborah Harlen of Bark Busters works with Gus, a 5-year-old dachshund belonging to Jason and Melissa Llewellen. Gus' incessant barking when visitors enter the Llewellen's home makes it difficult for them to have company over to visit.

Bark

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and operating in eight countries, Harlen is one of only two Bark Busters trainers in Indiana. Her franchise services northern Indianapolis and its surrounding communities.

Harlen said the service actually trains dog owners how to train their dogs effectively. She said owners often make the mistake of trying to communicate with their pets the way they would communicate with people. In some instances, they may actually be encouraging the behavior they are trying to eliminate.

"Our methods are more natural communication methods as far as the way the dog communicates with other dogs, how they think or see the world," Harlen said.

Dogs are social creatures. Their natural tendency is to form together in packs from which a dominant dog or leader of the pack will emerge. The other dogs in the pack vie for their place in the pack.

Dogs kept as house pets view the humans in the home as other dogs in the pack. Behaviors such as a constant barking, jumping up on furniture or on people or chewing on household items are often an effort on the dog's part

to assert its dominance in the pack. In Gus' case Harlen said, his constant barking when visitors enter the Llewellen's home is an attempt to control who is joining the pack.

"We're just going to explain to him in a canine way that is not his job," Harlen said.

Dogs use body language and vocal commands to establish dominance within a pack. A dog that exhibits consistent dominant behavior will emerge as the leader. Harlen said humans all too often send their dogs inconsistent messages about who is in charge.

Harlen showed the Llewellens how to use simple vocal commands and body language to reassert their dominance over Gus. Just minutes into his first lesson, Gus stopped barking. However, permanent changes in Gus' behavior will take time. Harlen said it takes most dogs about five weeks for their behavior to change permanently. Bark Busters guarantees results for the life of the dog.

"When we do the lesson, people see results in the lesson and then they of course need to work with dog 10 to 15 minutes a day to make the changes permanent so that the dog doesn't revert back to doing the behaviors they were doing before," Harlen said.