

Evanston Review

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Evanston trainer offers discipline for dogs



Karen Walsh described her 7-month-old, greater Swiss mountain dog, Annelise as “kind,” “affectionate,” and “great with kids.”

Walsh, who is an Evanston mother of five, also called the puppy the family got last April “exuberant,” which led her a few months ago to seek professional help to train the dog.

“We knew she’d get big, and we needed behavioral training,” said Walsh. “We needed help with things like not jumping on people, not mouthing all over people, not pulling us down the street on her leash, coming when called, and things you’d hope a well behaved dog would do.”

At the recommendation of Annelise’s veterinarian, Walsh called Marlene Marks, a dog behavioral therapist and trainer, and the co-owner of her franchise, Bark Busters, an in-home dog training service that specializes in dog behavior modification.

“She’s taught us every step of the way,” said Walsh, who explained that the training sessions were every week at first, and that now Marks comes over about once a month. “Good ways of approaching problems, how to train the dog without use of treats or a prong collar, and how to keep commands simple, straightforward and using lots of praise.”

Bark Busters is an Australia-based franchise with 400 owners around the world, and 12 in the Chicagoland area that include Marks and her husband, Howard. The two own the rights to territories that include Evanston, Wilmette and Skokie.

“Dogs understand body language,” said Marks, who had a 30-year career in management consulting, followed by an Italian beef restaurant she and Howard owned for six years prior to buying Bark Busters in 2009. “They understand the tone of your voice. When you say ‘No,’ they don’t get it. Eighty-five percent of the way a dog communicates is through body language, and that’s what we teach.”

Marks said she has always loved dogs, and has had dogs her whole life, including the family dogs, Stella, a Labradoodle, and Blanche, an Old English Sheepdog. In high school, Marks worked as a dog groomer and also showed dogs.

When she and Howard started the business they were required to complete 500 hours of training and education from Bark Busters corporate training program that included onsite training, video conferences, and training in the field.

“Dogs need consistency,” Marks said. “They need to know that there is someone to take care of their basic needs and if they don’t have that, they start to take over and they become the leaders, acting out, jumping, barking, nipping and pulling on the leash.”

Bark Busters trains both puppies and older dogs in behavioral issues and housebreaking, if needed.



The company charges a flat fee for the service, which include a two- to three-hour initial visit, during which Marks teaches dog owners the methodology and begins training the dog. Four to seven one-hour subsequent appointments follow.

“It’s a huge draw that she comes to our home,” Walsh said. “Everyone is here and we’re all learning the same thing as opposed to me coming home and saying, ‘Here’s what she said.’”

Bark Busters offers a lifetime guarantee, meaning Marks will come back to the home at any time during the dog’s life, if needed.

“This has made having a puppy so much more pleasurable,” said Walsh.

“I have a saying: Treat your dog like a human and he’ll treat you like a dog,” Marks said. “My goal is to improve the relationship between the dog and its owner. When the owner is happy and the dog feels safe, people get the maximum enjoyment out of their dog.”

By Jackie Pilossoph For Sun-Times Media
October 2013