

Member Profile

Editor Nicole Wilde, CPDT-KA



Heather and Handsome Dan

Heather Gutshall, CPDT-KA, C.L.A.S.S. Instructor and Evaluator

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Years in Business: 5

Personal Training Philosophy: Reward the behaviors you want, ignore the ones you don't. And learn to listen to the dog.

How long have you been in business?

Five years full-time. My time is split evenly between running Handsome Dan's Rescue for Pit Bull Dogs (not-for-profit) and Outbound Hounds. Outbound Hounds offers private training, daily group park trips (run by my partner, Mark Stoutzenberger), pet-sitting in our kennel/shelter licensed home, and most recently group "Pit C.L.A.S.S." as a partnership between Outbound Hounds and Handsome Dan's Rescue.

How did you get started?

The business grew organically from fostering dogs with behavioral and medical issues to learning how to teach those dogs the skills they needed to be peacefully and safely placed in loving homes. After adopting the Victory Dog Handsome Dan and seeing one of his trainers from Best Friends Animal Society, Ann Allums, in action, I decided I wanted to learn more about dog behavior and training. We founded Handsome Dan's Rescue in 2009, with a foster-based rescue group focusing on dogs in local shelters who are not considered likely candidates for adoption. I earned my CPDT-KA certification in 2011 and we added private training to our Outbound Hound offerings. I am currently working with behaviorist Katenna Jones to become SAFER certified and conduct behavioral evaluations at our local municipal shelter.

Are you involved in any dog sports or activities?

Pit C.L.A.S.S. We run a popular group class on Saturday mornings at a local park. We follow the APDT's C.L.A.S.S. curriculum but have added several other items to address issues that some pit bull type dogs face. The program is offered free to foster or shelter dogs and for a small fee to owned dogs. Handsome Dan's Rescue volunteer enrichment specialists bring dogs from local shelters to C.L.A.S.S. to provide them with physical and mental exercise outside of their kennels, to teach them the skills to earn their certifications, and to ultimately be adopted.

How do you get your business, and what is your relationship like with the veterinarians in your community?

I have been fortunate enough that referrals from clients, adopters, vets, and colleagues have been abundant enough to sustain and grow our business. We have

wonderful relationships with several local veterinary practices, including our rescue partner vet, the VCA Povar Animal Hospital, and the RI Community Spay/Neuter Clinic where we offer free spay/neuter vouchers to the public for owned "at-risk" dogs.

Do you belong to a trainer networking group, or otherwise consult with/refer to trainers in your area?

I am a member of the RI Dog Trainer's Network and the RI Pit Bull Coalition. I am also a Mentor Trainer with Animal Behavior College. I consult regularly with other trainers. My assistant trainer, Patrick King, and Katenna Jones are the first numbers I call when I need a second set of eyes or ears. Keeping open to other perspectives allows me to be a better trainer.

What is your community's perspective in regard to positive training?

The trainers in my professional network are either CPDTs, apply LIMA methods, and/or are cross-over trainers. There are still a small number of dominance/fear based trainers in the area but there are constant opportunities to educate the public on the differences between the two and what makes positive training so rewarding.

What do you believe are the three most important things to teach a dog?

For training clients with pet dogs with no major behavioral issues: a bullet-proof recall; drop it or leave it, particularly if the owner chooses to play tug with their dog; and the most important is "look" or focus.

For the majority of dogs, the most important thing to teach is trust; to trust their person when they are frightened, when they are challenged, when they are engaged in something fun or interesting, and to trust them when past experiences have taught them not to trust. That's really the big one for most of the dogs in our programs

What types of cases do you find most challenging and why? What techniques or philosophies have you found helpful in dealing with those cases?

My passion lies in working with fearful dogs, which I find both most challenging and most rewarding. I take full advantage of all the special equipment on the market,

from Thundershirts to DAP. I practice giving dogs calming signals and show dog handlers how to offer them. I particularly like taking things slow and spending time allowing the dog to open up in his own time, especially with dogs in shelters who need someone to just listen and respect what they are trying to communicate. I have had great success using targeting with fearful dogs.

What advice would you give other trainers about working with dogs and their owners?

Be patient with your clients. Patience comes much easier for me with the dogs than the owners!

Can you offer a specific tip or trick for working with dogs or owners that other trainers might find helpful?

Forget about food bowls in exchange for food dispensing toys.

What was your scariest moment with a dog or client?

I first automatically thought of an altercation early in my training career between a client dog and my foster dog (who had been rescued from a fighting situation), and the mistakes I made in pushing my foster dog too far too fast and not allowing him the time and space he asked for. (Both dogs were fine but I ended up in the E.R.)

In hindsight that was really not as scary as thinking back to the dogs I could not help. While working with dogs who are deemed "unadoptable," I have come to love dogs who were damaged beyond repair and have had to come to the heart-wrenching realization that gently letting them go was the most humane course of action.

What would you say are the top three things you have personally learned as a trainer?

1. To slow down and remember that my clients are not dog trainers. Just because I think their dog's training should be the most important thing in their world, I can excuse them if they don't share my enthusiasm.
2. To listen to other trainers, handlers, rescuers, shelter staff, et cetera, and to keep an open mind to their techniques and style. But I have also learned, and am still learning, how to find my own way and to be confident in my abilities, experience and gut feelings.
3. We can't fix 'em all. Sadly, some dogs are not "fixable." Management may be the best we can do in some cases. In others, well, those are the worst.

What was the last training-related seminar you attended?


IAABC Conference, April 2012

Are there any specific books, authors, DVDs, or seminars that have influenced you as a trainer?

Jean Donaldson, Patricia McConnell, Ian Dunbar, Sophia Yin, *Language of Dogs* DVD and many others.

Nicole Wilde, CPDT-KA is the author of nine books including **Help for Your Fearful Dog, So You Want to be a Dog Trainer, and Don't Leave Me!** She lectures internationally and domestically on canine behavior, is an "Ask the Expert" columnist for **Modern Dog** magazine, and co-stars in the DVD **Train Your Dog: The Positive Gentle Method**. Nicole is on the Advisory Board of the Companion Animal Sciences Institute, a professional member of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT), and a popular speaker at the organization's annual conferences. You can visit Nicole's "Wilde About Dogs" blog at <http://wildewmn.wordpress.com>, find her on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/NicoleWildeAuthor> and follow her on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/NicoleWilde>.







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