

Good training curbs bad habits

SHARI STAPLER

Bulletin staff

Fido pulls your arm off whenever you hook him up to a leash for a walk around the block. Daisy barks at anyone who ventures up to your doorstep.

You know it's a problem, so what do you do? Sign up for an obedience class for you and your dog.

A six-week course is offered through the Manteca Parks & Recreation Department and is taught by Marion MacDannald and her daughter Janet Bates.

"The two of us have been working together for many years," MacDannald said. "I think it has been almost 19 that we have been teaching classes there."

The class meets Tuesdays behind the city offices on West Center Street and focuses on breaking bad habits of the dogs and even the owners.

Judy Alcazar, who took an obedience class when her 4-year-old German shepherd was just a puppy, said she needed training as much as her dog.

"When I got Blaze he was my first dog and I had no idea how to get him to walk on a leash much less sit and stay," Alcazar said. "I enrolled in the class offered by the parks department and learned a lot about handling him, plus he was able to socialize with other dogs which was great for him."

Owners are allowed to enroll their puppies in the class as soon as they have completed all of their puppy shots. But the class is not limited to puppies, older dogs can join in too.

"We have had dogs as old as 12 who have come for training," MacDannald said. "There are all ages and we have around 24 dogs enrolled during each session."

Bates and MacDannald begin by teaching the dogs who is boss, the owner. Dogs are trained to go in a down position and not get up until their owner releases them.

Down is the position of submission and once the dog masters that, the rest comes easy, according to MacDannald.

"The most difficult dogs to train are those that are aggressive. We have to get the dogs over that quickly and, if people stick with it and do what we say, they will be good dogs."

— Marion MacDannald

"We also teach people that they don't have to have their dogs with them every second of the day," MacDannald said. "It teaches them to have a very good temperament and they are able to stay on their own if the owner works all day."

Alcazar said the obedience training does make it easier for her to leave Blaze home during short trips or when she is at work all day.

"I don't worry that he is going to get into something and I know he'll be safe," Alcazar said. "He only barks when there is a threat and he knows all of my neighbors."

Alcazar admitted there were some difficult times during training, something MacDannald said she runs into often with obedience training.

"The most difficult dogs to train are those that are aggressive," MacDannald said. "We have to get the dogs over that quickly and, if people stick with it and do what we say, they will be good dogs."

A well-trained dog is easy to come by if owners stick to a training regimen, have patience and give lots of loving reinforcement.

"Positive reinforcement is what it's all about," MacDan-

nald said. "Most dogs can hardly wait to get back to class. It's fun for the dogs and the people."

The recreation office is open Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at 252 Magnolia Lane on the west side of the Manteca Civic Center complex to register for classes.

Non-Manteca residents who live outside the city limits pay \$5 extra for the \$65 class that is an hour long.

Bates said they spend first hour working on obedience and, as long as their are people who need help, she and MacDannald will be on hand to assist.

For more information or to register for the dog obedience class, call the parks department at 239-8470.

3-21-00