

Molly Feeney Offers Holistic Approach to Dog Training

By BRENDA HILMELFARB

You might say that animal trainer Molly Feeney is a combination Dr. Benjamin Spock and Dr. Andrew Weil to dogs and cats.

Feeney combines Spock's "common sense" approach, and Weil's "holistic" technique in her animal socialization classes "Just Paws", to be taught at The Golden Fleece (15233 La Cruz) beginning the first week of December.

"Puppies are just like kids," says Feeney, a newcomer to the Palisades. "They need to be disciplined at an early age, in a stable environment."

Feeney, who hails from Minneapolis, began working with holistic veterinarians as well as Dr. Ian Dunbar, an animal behaviorist who created "off-leash positive reinforcement training, after graduating from the University of Minnesota.

"Just Paws" is a seven-week, positive comprehensive off-leash obedience/behavior/temperament training course specifically designed for puppies or adult dogs. Puppies must be at least 12 weeks old at the time of the first class date; adolescent and adult dogs are grouped according to age. Nutritional recommendations will also be covered throughout the course.

"It's been found that using positive reinforcement with one's animals gets quick long-term results," says

Feeney. "I don't allow metal collars or choke chains. In fact I don't use anything more than a buckle collar or another leash called a "gentle leader", known as a "halti", which is fashioned after a horse halter. In that way, the dog is more confident, as it's not being yanked around. I also like to involve the whole family in the class," continues Feeney, "or anyone who is going to be around the dog."

Even Feeney's dog, Gabby, participates and is sometimes used for demonstrations. "Gabby is very well-trained," says Feeney, explaining that she is a therapy dog who visits nursing homes and childrens hospitals to lift spirits.

Feeney also provides in-home animal care, which she says "allows your pet the stress-free environment they all deserve while you are away." In addition to daily visits, the service provides such things as midday exercising and pet supply delivery.

"I really believe in a combination of involving the whole family, natural remedies and praise when training one's animals," says Feeney. "Everyone can give praise. Even a 5 year-old can learn to do that!"

Feeney is holding an open house for dogs and owners on Sunday, December 5, noon to 2 at Golden Fleece. There will be a raffle and refreshments.