

Backcountry K-9 training brings harmony to hikes

By JANE K. DOVE

It's hard to believe that spring is only about two months away, and many nature lovers are looking forward eagerly to getting back outside, many of them with their loyal dogs at their side.

Backcountry K-9 Training, headquartered in Waccabuc and serving the entire region, is on a mission to help dog owners make their trips to area parks and preserves as enjoyable as possible. Training for outdoor adventures is one of the company's specialties.

Backcountry K-9 training is owned and operated by Waccabuc's Josh Abolt. It is a one-of-a-kind operation, according to its owner, with services ranging from basic obedience training to behavior modification of undesirable habits, including aggression. But the service that draws a lot of interest, he said, is training dogs to accompany their owners on hikes in parks and preserves, mountain biking and other adventures.

Mr. Abolt built Backcountry K-9 gradually, working first at animal shelters while getting his bachelor's degree and later attending the International School for Dog Training in North Carolina.

"I felt as though many dog training businesses just offered the basics and left a huge part of dog training out, which only serves to hurt the clients and their dogs," he told The Record-Review.

"I got the idea for specialty training for the hiker and biker with experience from my own rescue dog,

Bella. I began to do mountain bike riding with her and saw how much fun she had, and how much people were fascinated by seeing her work so smoothly with me when I was riding. I have now progressed to the point where I can train every mountain biker who wants to include their sidekick on their rides."

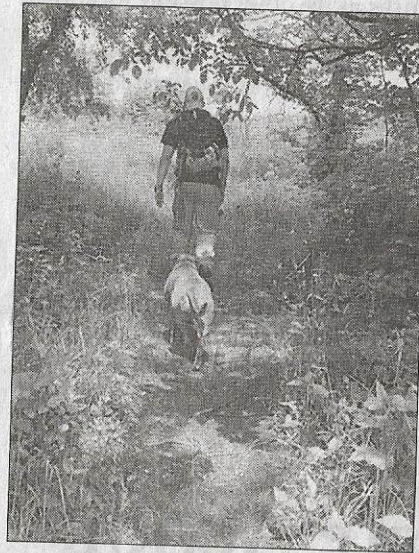
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— JOSH ABOLT, OWNER OF
BACKCOUNTRY K-9 TRAINING

Mr. Abolt believes that every dog and every owner are different, and that the training needs to be individualized. "We are not a chain or trying to push a certain way of training. We want our clients to become part of our family along with their dogs. That's why I created the Outing Adventure segment, which gives the opportunity to get clients together and give our dogs the freedom they deserve in the outdoors."

Mr. Abolt said most owners want to have their dogs with them when they go on jaunts and the training Backcountry provides is designed to make the outings both fun and safe.

Mr. Abolt said he teaches tech-



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Josh Abolt and his rescue dog, Bella, hiking on a park trail. Bella on a recent walk in Ward Pound Ridge Reservation.

niques to avoid confrontations with other dogs that may be walking in the woods. "If you are happily biking or hiking down a trail with your well-trained dog, what do you do when you see another strange dog approaching in a menacing fashion? The first thing is to stop, bring your own dog to heel and then assess the situation. Most dogfights are unnecessary and do not have to happen."

Mr. Abolt said most of his clients request obedience training before taking to the trail. "The basic command is there for a reason," he said, "and having your dog come to you instantly when called is at the top of the list."

Behavior modification is another part of Mr. Abolt's approach to keeping harmony out on the trail.

"We tackle many aggressive behaviors that may not be covered by regular obedience training," he explained. "We are committed to showing that all dogs can be rehabilitated and become great members of human and canine societies."

Mr. Abolt's personal experience training his dog, Bella, a 2-year-old pit bull mix rescued from a shelter, provided more proof that behavior one may identify as aggressive can be misunderstood and modified.

"You and your dog deserve a happy and harmonious life together, doing the things that bring pleasure to both of you," You might think it is impossible, but it is not."

When asked about the intricacies of training your dog to interact with a moving mountain bike, Mr. Abolt said patience and common sense are key.

"Introduce him to the bike with you pushing it while he walks alongside. Let him become totally familiar with how it works and turns." One day, you will mount the bike, call the dog to heel and ride off, your dog at your side. They are very smart animals and learn quickly. Start alone at first and you will be surprised at how quickly they pick it up."

Mr. Abolt offers free consultations to assess goals for the Outing Adventure training, or as he put it, "what you want to achieve with your dog out in our beautiful fields and parks."

For more information, call 299-6596 or visit Backcountryk9.org.

Police Report