

40 years of problem pups

Trainer says firm-but-fair approach makes for better dogs

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Training reckless dogs to be obedient sounds like a harsh job but it's a labour of love for champion dog trainer Wolfram Klose.



Dog trainer Wolfram Klose and Pepper the dog at the Havelberg Dog Academy in Orono, Ont.

Nicknamed "Wolf" by his friends and family, the 68-year-old owner of Havelberg Dog Academy has trained dogs for Hollywood movies and CBC television productions and has won his share of dog training awards.

Born in communist East Germany, Klose, escaped across the border when he was 17 to find adventure in the West. He worked as a police officer for several years before coming to Canada with his wife in the 1960s.

A lifelong dog lover, Klose opened Havelberg Dog Academy in 1968 on an empty, treeless plot of land and building the academy from the ground up by himself. Today, the academy still sits on that same plot of land in Orono, Ont., and now includes a zoological park, a pet cemetery and a bed and breakfast.

Klose still trains dogs in the original kennels he built more than 40 years ago and says the secret to treating disobedient dogs is to be firm but fair.

"Most dogs are spoiled because their owners let them get away with murder. You have to be fair to the dog but still control them. I treat every dog as if they're the only dog in the world," Klose said.

He says he's frustrated at people who use spiked collars on their dog and pull too hard on choke-chains because such methods are inhumane and counter-productive. He suggests kind contact is the best habit to develop when training a dog, as it teaches the animal to wait for an owner's permission before doing things.

"If you pull the dog and don't pet it, that's abuse. You have to treat the dog more personally. Once they trust you, you can control them and correct them," Klose said.

Klose's first job in Canada was as a machine operator because he couldn't speak any English. He quickly realized he could make more money training just two dogs at a time than he could working 40-hour weeks for a whole month doing machining, so he sold his house and devoted himself to training dogs.

"I was fanatical — that's all I did. I had no kids, so I spent all my time with the dogs," Klose said.

He says passion is key to maintaining a caring attitude when working with animals and it's something you can't just pick up by accident.

"That passion for animals, you're born with it. You have to have it — I don't think you can learn it," Klose said.

For more information, go to <http://www.havelbergdogacademy.com>