



Suncoast Puppy Raisers  
*May newsletter special edition*

# GDF Suncoast Puppy Raisers Newsletter

May 2017



Hi everyone,

We are under unusual circumstances; we will not be having any monthly Puppy Saturday or subgroup meetings in May. Since we just sent 4 pups back to New York for training, the only one left is Sunny being raised by Don and Donna Thompson. Karen Killen is expecting her new pup Tommy any day now, they will have their paws full doing some low keyed exposures and getting to know each other. They will be working to get off to a good start together. We will meet with both of them individually.

We expect the group to be building back up by next month. Several of our current raisers have agreed to raise again but want to take a short break.

Also, we have received 3 new puppy raiser applications so Chuck and I will be busy doing their in home visits. Therefore, by late summer or early fall, we will have a whole new group, so stay tuned. We will see what June brings, if we have enough pups to do a meeting we will, or we will meet one on one with the pups and raisers we do have who are actively raising. By July we should be back to a normal schedule.



**Pups and Puppy raisers relax before the real fun gets started at last months in for training party!**

## *Last Month*

In April, we joined the Arc of Tampa Bay at Philippe Park for their annual picnic. Of course, the dogs were a big hit, many of the attendees came to pet them and tell us all about their own pets. Then, the pups were entertained while about 20 guests joined a drum circle and were pounding on all sorts of percussion instruments. Actually, the performance was quite good and most of the pups just laid down and listened. Along with food and good company, it was a beautiful day in the park.

For our subgroup meeting, we held a BIG going away pool party and BBQ at our house. Eight pups were in attendance including our mutt, Trouble. Chuck cooked brats and hamburgers on the grill and after the pups finished their frosty treat, we hit the pool. All but the Poodle got a shot at swimming, but Amy had the most fun. We couldn't keep her out of the pool. I hope the person she is matched with likes to swim.

## *In for Training*

On Sunday morning April 30<sup>th</sup>, we bid a bitter sweet good[bye to the following dogs; Amy raised by co-raisers Shannon Rhodes and Darleen Bigham, Walter B., raised by Mike and Alicia Masterson, Mickey, raised by Karen Killen and Ivan, raised by Eileen Newsome. Ivan a very cute little Black Lab was released from the program due to having multiple seizures. But Ivan is going to be well taken care of and will get a loving forever home in New York. We also had Marylynn and Paul Caruso raised Ziggy. They are members of the new puppy raiser group The Gulf Coast Puppy Raisers. They recently moved from NY to south west FL. They joined the new group to finish Ziggy. It was nice to meet them and Ziggy, it looks like he was ready to head off to college and make them very proud. Good job Marylynn and Paul!



## *New Arrival*

Karen Killen is anxiously awaiting the arrival of her next pup Tommy, a male yellow Lab. We will have to send out some pictures when he arrives.

## *Graduation*

We are very proud to announce that Buddy, raised by Jackie Jordan graduated last month from Southeastern. Jackie and Shannon along with Jackie's son and daughter –in-law were able to attend the celebration. Jackie has been under the weather but was grateful she could make the event. Of course she is very proud and as we usually here from puppy raisers, "it could not have been a better match!" Congratulations Jackie and we are keeping our paws and fingers crossed that Amy, Walter B. and Mickey enjoy the same success.

## *Training Tip*

This month's training tip is curtesy of Deana Izzo. She is doing a series of them so we look forward to sharing them with you. This month's tip is near and dear to our hearts. As most of you know we always say the area a puppy raiser makes the biggest impact is in their pup's house manners. These cannot be taught when the dog is in for training. It is where we make the biggest impact on the blind person who gets your pup as their guide. Thanks Deana for laying it out there for all of us to work on our pups house manners.

I know it feels like we are always harping on house manners but we do this because the pup you are raising to be a guide dog will be placed with someone without vision so their house manners must be excellent.

There's a point in time where the dog mentally moves from a conditioned response to a habit (good and bad) and we have to be diligent on preventing this transition to a bad habit simply because habits are so hard, if not impossible, to break. In this context, a conditioned response is meant to be



**Now the party has really swung into full gear! Cory even liked trying the game of bobbing for the ball.**



something we've allowed to happen. For example, something we've allowed to happen might be leaving something within reach of the dog to destroy, leaving them home for longer than they are ready for or perhaps not setting them up for success when you do leave. Setting the dog up for success is based on the dogs' age and maturity.

For a pup under 4 months of age, all you should be doing is going into a different room for a minute to get a drink or go to the bathroom while they are sleeping or chewing on a toy.

A pup between 4-6 months of age should be tired (tired puppies are good puppies) and left a "special toy" when you leave. For example: my pup and I have practiced being home alone for 5-15 minutes at a time with consistent success out of the crate and in a clean room many times and are doing well. We've played or gone for a walk to expel their energy and I'm going to increase the time I leave them to 30 minutes. I give the pup a special toy (maybe a kong with a little peanut butter or an edible busy bone), casually tell them "I'll be right back" and walk out the door giving the pup 30 minutes alone out of the crate and I return with a casual "hi sweetie". We are practicing in short intervals, setting the pup up for success by keeping the room clean, having given the pup an opportunity to expel energy and left the pup with something to keep them occupied.

Around 6 months of age you will start to notice that the pup is beginning to mature and beginning to recognize the meaning of the works you've been conditioning them to, like sit and down. At this period of time you should do as above, gradually increasing the amount of time to 1 hour by about 9 months of age. You should also start "seeding" the floor when you are home as well on continuing to work on being left home alone. When you start with seeding the floor, you should be home so you are able to keep an eye on the item you've left within their reach. For example, you leave a sock on floor, the dog goes to pick it up, tell them to "leave it" and if they look at you or come to you, leaving the sock behind, calm praise, pick up the item and practice again later. As the dog earns your trust with a single item while you are home, you can start changing or adding different items that are of greater interest, called "value". You can also begin leaving the room the item is in for short periods of time. If the dog bolts to anything you drop in the kitchen or bathroom, practice the leave it command. Drop something, like an empty pill bottle, tell them to leave it and praise them calmly for leaving it (even if they are standing over it) so long as they didn't pick it up. Continuing this type of practice many times a day and when the dog doesn't go for the item, then leave out the verbal leave it command.



**Top 2 pictures Frozen treats for all the 4 legged guests. Above: Karen & Mickey enjoying a dip in the pool.**



From 9-12 months of age, the dog hits the "terrible two's". You'll notice the pup starts to test you (does no really mean no). You might notice that commands they used to do quickly you are now having to tell them more than once to do. Be patient, be consistent and be persistent through this stage. I promise they really do grow up. It is okay to "step back" in training to continue setting them up for success. "Stepping back" means to go back to a previous amount of time home alone where they were successful but always try and move them forward in time. Your goal for this age is 2 hours home alone in a clean room, continuing to seed the floor with various objects while you are home.

From 12-14 months of age you'll begin to think the pup might actually make it as a guide dog. Once we get through the terrible two's, there's another maturity leap. At this age, you can start leaving low value items on the floor while you are gone for short periods of time. A low value item might be a shoe or sock where a high value item might be paper. Value in items varies from dog to dog. The goal here is our maximum, 4 hours home alone out of the crate. This is the age where we are moving from a conditioned response to a habit and we want good

habits. No longer are we leaving them with something to do, like a stuffed kong, but you should leave their normal toys out and continue to be sure they have had an activity to expel energy.

From 14 months of age to IFT, which is around 16 months of age when this was written, continue to seed the floor and leaving these items out while you are gone. The goal here is 4 hours home alone without having to think about what the dog could get into while you are gone, this includes the trash can. A trash can should always have a lid on it.

What if you just can't seem to progress? Ask yourself if you are setting the pup up for success as outlined here. You can also set up Skype or any other live feed on your computer and sit outside the door and watch on your phone, don't let the pup see you. The minute the pup does something they aren't supposed to, barge in and scold them with a "No! Leave it" but leave the item where it is and go back outside. If you feel like your pup knows when you are setting them up, then look at what you do normally and ask yourself if you are doing the same things when you set them up. Dogs observe behavior and body language so you might not even realize you are "cuing" them that a training session has started. Are you putting your shoes on, picking up your purse or back pack, pulling out your car keys? All these are subtle signs that something is different. Don't make a big deal about coming or going. This too might be cuing the dog that you are setting them up.

Teaching house manners can be very difficult as you have to carve out time every single day to work on them but they are one of the biggest reasons that we release dogs from our program. When the dogs go IFT, they are living in a kennel (a sterile environment) where house manners are not being worked on. The trainer's job is to teach them how to be a guide dog not to work on house manners. If there are house manner issues at this point, we have a bad habit and this is very difficult if not impossible to correct.

As always, if you are having trouble and can't seem to progress in time, please, talk with your AC or myself. We may have other ideas to help you help the pup to progress and be a great guide dog.

Thanks Deana! Cannot wait to see next months! You're A/C's Debbie & Chuck Hietala



**Above a quick kiss for good luck a group photo and your pups are off to change people's lives! What a great group of people and dogs. You make us so very proud to know each and every one of you.**