

Citizen awards help fight anti-dog sentiment

By Casey Hens
staff writer

If Heather Armbruster had her way, all dogs would be good neighbors, have good manners, and live with responsible owners.

The Birmingham resident thinks she's barking up the right tree.

Recent publicity about pit bull terriers and other breeds being trained as attack dogs for city drug lords hasn't helped the image of dog as pet. But all dogs can be trained to be responsible, as can their owners, said Armbruster, a trainer and owner of dog schools in Birmingham, Farmington and Berkeley.

She's also the owner of two Doberman, which are trained for security purposes but also make wonderful pets.

"I think there has always been an anti-canine sentiment," she said. "I can't say I've noticed any difference. But the pit bull situation hasn't helped."

IN AN EFFORT to diffuse anti-canine feelings, Armbruster helped to bring the American Kennel Club's "Canine Good Citizen" program to the area. The AKC program is designed to demonstrate that a dog can be a good companion, a respected member of the community and that

it can be trained and conditioned to behave in the home and in public places.

Some 20 owners of mixed breed and purebred dogs from throughout Southern and Western Oakland County brought their pets for testing Saturday, Aug. 26. Dogs with proper manners and acceptable behavior were awarded a Canine Good Citizen certificate.

Birmingham was the first location in the country to do the testing, sponsored locally by the Birmingham Dog Obedience School, owned and operated by Armbruster.

"It makes for owners that are happy, neighbors that are happy and a

dog that's a good citizen," she said. "It stresses owner responsibility."

Armbruster said she hopes the Canine Good Citizen verification will allow pets and their owners more privileges, including walks in city parks and visits to residents of senior homes. Currently in Birmingham, no dogs are allowed in city parks, but Armbruster hopes that may be changed with the new program.

SHE SUGGESTS that owners of dogs passing the Canine Good Citizen test be allowed to buy special collars which would identify their dogs, allowing them to walk in the park

while letting police enforce dog laws. Proceeds from the sale of the collars could go to the city and help pay for such enforcement.

James Dearinger, secretary of the AKC, said the program was designed "as a response to the anti-canine sentiment that has painfully been gaining momentum these past few years." Dearinger said the group supports good legislation, but opposes laws that are breed-specific, such as banning of pit bull terriers or other such laws.

During the Canine Good Citizen test, three people evaluate each dog to 10 areas, which the dogs either pass or fail. Even though the Ameri-

can Kennel Club sponsors the program, it is done by local clubs and training schools. Evaluation areas include: appearance and grooming, accepting a stranger, walking on loose lead, walking through a crowd, sitting for exam, "sit" and "down" on command, staying in position, reaction to another dog, reactions to distractions and dog left alone.

Armbruster said she is encouraged by the new AKC program, but time will tell what impact it will have on attitudes toward dogs. "I'm hoping it will encourage people to come back to rescue a stranger, walking on loose lead, walking through a crowd, sitting for exam, 'sit' and 'down' on command, staying in position, reaction to another dog, reactions to distractions and dog left alone." she said. "A lot of anti-canine feeling is people's responsibility too."

Veteran Ewart is new Hills district chief

Promoted to Farmington Hills district chief, Dave Ewart, a 16-year veteran, assumed command of Station 4 Aug. 17.

He will be responsible for overseeing the operation of Station 4, which provides fire and emergency medical services to the northwest quadrant of Farmington Hills.

"Dave has shown a strong sense of dedication and leadership during his tenure with the department. His commitment to providing the best service to the citizens of Farmington Hills is unquestionable," said Fire Chief Richard Marinucci.

Ewart rose through the ranks of fire fighter, sergeant, lieutenant and captain before becoming district chief. He has been a member of the department's Special Emergency Response Team since its inception in 1986.

Ewart holds a 240-hour fire fighter training certificate and a Basic Emergency Medical Technician license from the State of Michigan.

Special training includes fire fighter safety and survival, rope rescue, radiological emergencies and fire investigation.



Dave Ewart
Station 4 chief

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