

LAKE COUNTY

SATURDAY

March 10, 2007

Post-Tribune

NORTHWEST INDIANA'S LEADING NEWSPAPER | www.post-trib.com



PHOTOS BY STEPHANIE DOWELL/POST-TRIBUNE

Curtis Scott rewards Ivy, a 3-year-old pit bull, for good social behavior with a squirt of cheese.

Behavior counselor works with the dogs

Trainer rehabilitates rescued, abused pit bulls

By MICHELLE L. QUINN
Post-Tribune correspondent

CROWN POINT — When a 60-plus pound chocolate American pit bull came lunging at Jim Tobin with her teeth bared and growling, his first instinct was that he and the dog weren't going to be friends.

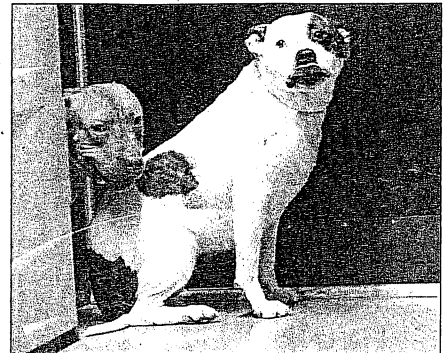
So having Sadie, a relatively recent addition to the Lake County Animal Shelter, prance up to him and slather him with dog kisses is nothing short of amazing, at least to Tobin, who's one of the shelter's animal catchers. And he has Curtis Scott to thank for the newfound friendship.

Scott, a certified professional dog trainer and behavior counselor out of Chicago, has been working with Sadie and 12 other pit bulls living at the shelter to help get them socialized and ready for adoption. His task has been a challenge since many of the dogs were rescued from the alleged dog-fighting ring found in Calumet Township, and were completely unsocialized upon their arrival.

Mercedes, a 3 or 4 year-old pit bull found in Calumet Township, was heartbreaking to look at when she came in, said Shelter Rescue Coordinator Judy Bonaventura.

"She was skin and bones, had gangrene on her tail — just in bad, bad shape," Bonaventura said. "She was scared of people, but now she's a totally different dog."

Unlike some dog trainers



Sampson (left) and Bella hide in a corner at the first sight of a photographer's flash.

For information

To contact Curtis Scott about dog-training tips, go to his Web site at www.canisfamiliaris.info or e-mail curtis5759@sbcglobal.net

who claim to be "psychologists" who read what the dog is thinking or feeling, Scott said he doesn't need to read anything on any of them. He knows that the dogs want comfort and reassurance more than anything else. And doggie treats, of course, like the cheese-in-a-can he brings for his students.

"It's positive reinforcement: You either do what I ask, or you don't get anything," he said. "And ignore jumping."

The dogs are first trained to be around people, and then

they're brought in with other dogs — at first with muzzles, then without. Because the Calumet Township dogs were raised to fight other dogs, they likely won't be able to live in a home with other pets, Bonaventura said.

"Usually when dogs like that are found, they're euthanized because people think immediately that pit bulls are dangerous," she said. "That's why Curtis has been so invaluable to us; we knew these were good dogs and they deserved a better life than what they had."

Clinton George of Hammond and Kevin Nelson of Cedar Lake also come to the shelter almost every day to work with the dogs.

"We got lucky; we just happened to be here," George said.