

Cutler Bay

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SERVING SOUTH DADE

National dog and baby safety program now available locally

BY LEE STEPHENS

Baby's homecoming should be a joyous event for everyone in the family. But unfortunately, the pitter-patter of little feet — not to mention the crying, chaotic schedules, and cranky parents that follow close on their heels — strikes fear in the heart of many a brave dog.

Too many dogs lose their homes when, in a sleep-deprived haze their families decide that something has to give. Now, however, dogs and their families in the South Florida can breathe a sigh of relief — Dogs&Storks is here to help.

Created in 2002, the national Dogs&Storks program has helped hundreds of expectant parents integrate their two-legged and four-legged family members using gentle, effective techniques that are also fun and safe. Jennifer Shryock, a certified dog behavior consultant, designed the program, drawing on her degree in Special Education, plus her experiences raising three children and over 70 foster dogs.

Since the program's inception in Shryock's native North Carolina, Dogs&Storks has recruited a select number of highly qualified canine behavior specialists to take this vital service to the public nationwide. Locally, Dee Hoult, owner of Applause Your Paws Dog Training, is Dogs&Storks' latest addition.

"I'm really excited to have joined such a passionate team," Hoult said. "I have been working with families in the Miami area for a number of years now, specializing in training and behavior modification for the family dog. But unfortunately I usually see families after trouble has already begun."

The Dogs&Storks program allows presenters to reach expectant couples before baby comes home so that everyone in the family is prepared for a safe and smooth transition into the busy new life that babies bring.

"That makes for stress-free homecomings, and happily ever after," Shryock



Dee Hoult, owner of Applause Your Paws Dog Training, now offers the Dogs&Storks program. She is pictured here with one of her "clients."

said. "We want to make education available even before families know they need it."

By teaching expectant families to understand their dogs' sensitivities, body language, and attention-seeking behaviors, the Dogs&Storks program provides practical education during pregnancy and continued support after baby arrives. Licensed Dogs&Storks presenters help to address the concerns of expectant parents, decrease the stress associated with baby's arrival, and ensure the safety of all family members.

Dogs&Storks offers private consultations as well as semi-private workshops. And because presenters are not only educators, but also qualified professional dog trainers and behavior modification experts, they can design and implement management and training plans tailored to each family should the need for more in-depth intervention arise.

"Being involved with dog rescue, it's such a blessing to be part of another program that also helps reduce the number of dogs that will get surrendered to shelters while taking a ton of stress off of expecting

families," Hoult said.

Her clients agree.

Cindy Gonzalez, an expecting mother in Palmetto Bay is currently enrolled in Dogs&Storks with Hoult.

"Our four dogs are an important part of our family," Gonzalez said. "As first time parents, my husband and I want to do all we can to ensure our dogs stay in the family when the baby comes and remain a part of our new life."

Dee Hoult, owner of Applause Your Paws Dog Training, is the only Dogs&Storks presenter in South Florida. She also offers reward-based group classes, private lessons, and behavior consultations for pet dogs and their families in Miami-Dade.

For more information regarding reward-based training or the Dogs&Storks program, visit www.applauseyourpaws.com or www.dogsandstorks.com.