

by Elisha Boggs

UNLEASHING Man's Best Friend



*Dog whisperer
Angie Woods
improves dogs'
behavior across
the state.*

Angie Woods has trained Brad Pitt to run on the treadmill at her dog training center. Now he loves it.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK TUSZYNSKI

Brad Pitt runs five miles on the treadmill first thing every morning.

Then he runs five miles in the afternoon, and another five miles in the evening.

His new exercise regimen has contributed to a dramatic change in his demeanor. By surrounding himself with balanced friends, maintaining a healthy diet and getting out to enjoy fresh air on a regular basis, Pitt's new lifestyle makes him just one of the well-adjusted dogs in Angie Woods' 24-member pack. After Pitt, a pit bull mix, met Woods, his aggressive behavior toward other dogs and humans drastically changed.

Woods, a local dog whisperer and dog behavior expert, uses a realistic approach to transform the canine/human relationship. What is a dog whisperer, you ask? According to Woods, it is someone who has the innate ability to communicate with dogs. By taking understanding of dog psychology and turning it into a compassionate, non-violent method for training and correcting inappropriate dog behavior, Woods is giving hope to dog owners all over the state of Georgia.

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With a life-long fascination of animals, especially dogs, Woods worked as a veterinary technician for clinics in the Atlanta area for 15 years. As she continued to study dog behavior, she was troubled by the techniques taught at the seminars she attended. She began to research dog psychology and behavior on her own. "I went back to the dog and got away from the people," Woods says. "We try to take human attributes and apply them to a dog, hoping for a change. There is a difference between human psychology and dog psychology."

Woods says she discovered that it is important to look at a dog's behavior from a dog's perspective. "I teach people what dogs do, especially what they do in their natural habitat. That is how you get the best results," she shares. "It is not obedience training—it is functional training."

In the wild, dogs are very active, living in packs with an established pack leader. They run between 10-20 miles a day. Without proper exercise and a leader to follow, dogs become "unbalanced," which can lead to severe aggression, phobias, excessive barking, hyperactivity and, in general, bad manners. "A dog should walk at least four miles a day," asserts Woods. "Exercise is number one."

Woods encourages her clients to walk their dogs first thing in the morning and get them out to play as often as possible. For dog owners who are strapped for time or are unable to walk, she suggests training dogs to run on a treadmill. Woods trains dogs to run unleashed on a treadmill at her training center by introducing them to the discipline slowly and walking with the dogs until they are comfortable walking alone. Like Brad Pitt, most dogs will love it, says Woods.

Establishing the importance of pack leadership in order to address a dog's behavior problems, Woods first teaches people how to be good pack leaders, then teaches dogs how to be good followers. "Dogs want structure," says Woods.

She offers the example of walking a dog the right way. "When a pack is moving in a linear fashion, the head dog is always in the front," she explains. When you walk

a dog, Woods says, "Don't let the dog be in the front; it should be beside you or behind you." Although acting as the pack leader is a physical and mental exercise for a dog owner, it teaches the dog how to be calm, balanced and submissive. In order to be successful, Woods says, the entire family must be completely dedicated to the behavior techniques she provides.

Woods, who offers intense boarding training for two-week periods (or longer, if necessary) at her dog behavior center in Buford, introduces dogs with behavior problems into her pack of 24 dogs. Often, she says, a dog's poor behavior will improve immediately, because the well-behaved and mentally balanced dogs in the pack will teach the new dog how to follow the pack.

Nemo, an aggressive Pomeranian who was also a biter, came to Woods from a local humane society. He had been in six homes and was about to be put to sleep. Within an hour and a half after Nemo was introduced to Woods' pack, he was playing with the other dogs.

"Everyone that visits says, 'This is just a different way of thinking,'" says Woods. "Once they see it, they believe it. It is a

Best Books for Dog Owners

Angie Woods recommends two books to all of her clients:

- *Caesar's Way*
by Caesar Milan, dog whisperer
- *The Other End of the Leash*
by Patricia McConnell, animal behavior expert

way of living and being with your dog."

Angie Woods offers private in-home consultations and boarding training. Call 770-682-5434 or 888-USK-9DOG or visit www.atlantadogwhisperer.com for more information.

Elisha Boggs is a freelance writer and high school teacher in Gainesville who took along her dog Lucy when she interviewed Angie Woods for this story. Lucy thought Woods and her pack were great.



Often a dog's poor behavior will improve immediately when the dog is introduced to a well-behaved pack.