

# RESCUE: Bits of hot dog used to train animals

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commands most commonly demonstrated by pet owners, Zehfuss can teach a dog how to run through an agility course and to find people. He regularly teaches kindergarten obedience to people's pet dogs, and he has an agility course that he trains dogs on as well.

"People more and more want the agility course," Zehfuss said. "I started doing that four or five years ago. I told my wife five years ago that agility was going to be huge and I'm going to have a course."

A member of a dog club in Germany, the 40-year-old Zehfuss began his career about 18 years ago. Today, he is still a member of the club. He lives on the northwest side of Lawton with Tonja, his wife of 11½ years, four children, a cat, two guinea pigs and a dog. His children are Jessie, 8; Lori, 15; Jenna, 17; and Brandi, who is married.

"They all get along," he said of his many pets. "We adopted a cat and our dog, Spike (an Airedale terrier) helped raise her.

People bring their dogs to Zehfuss every day for training. In his 14th year of training, Zehfuss says he trains about 60 dogs per week. He spent the first several

years of his career training dog trainers in college.

When he got into agility training, Zehfuss had only one obstacle for the dogs to jump. His operation progressed one jump at a time until it reached the stage it's in today. He has several plastic barrels, hoops and other creative obstacles.

"Agility is not only good for sport," Zehfuss said while leading his giant schnauzer Racee through the obstacle course. "If a dog has some temperament problems, it helps."

Search-and-rescue training involves scent discrimination training.

"I start with a person laying the track," Zehfuss said as he set up a demonstration using his 21-month-old German shepherd Marco.

Zehfuss placed bits of hot dogs in front of each foot as he walked. In the meantime, Marco was tied to a tree. Once released, Marco systematically found each tiny morsel until he reached the mother lode — a pile of the meat at the end of the trail. He then briefly searched beyond the trail before returning to the end.

"This is how I start the training," he said. "Then I go further out and make the trail longer."

The training is not designed



PHILIP MUSE/STAFF

**Matthias Zehfuss leads Racee, his giant schnauzer, through an agility course at his home in northwest Lawton. He regularly trains dogs for obedience and agility.**

for every dog, but for those that possess some natural ability. That ability has to be brought out in them," Zehfuss said. "They must be determined to follow through. The trainer has to do his work."

For eight weeks of agility training, Zehfuss charges \$98,

while \$80 pays for kindergarten obedience.

Zehfuss does more than training. He also invites school children to his home/school for tours. His is the only dog training facility listed in the Yellow Pages. His phone number is 536-DOGS.

His other services include Schutzhund, problem-solving, tracking, home and personal protection.

"Protection training is only for approved dogs," he said. "A dog has to have a stable temperament."