

# German runs school that is for the dogs

By JACOB RUSSELL

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The saying goes, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," but, according to Mattias Zehfuss, that's only because he has not had a chance to work with them.

Zehfuss, owner and operator of Zehfuss K-9 Training Center in Lawton, began working with dogs more than 25 years ago while living in Germany. In 1986, he moved to the United States to pursue an education in animal behavior. Upon graduating, Zehfuss taught at a college in West Virginia before moving to Lawton to start his own school. He has been training dogs here now for 22 years.

"It's my dream," he said. "I've always wanted to train dogs. Since I was a little kid, I dreamed of training dogs."

That passion, Zehfuss said, is what allows him to be successful. In his 25-plus years, he estimates that he has given 40,000 to 50,000 lessons, to thousands of different dogs. While he said he will work with any and all breeds, his favorites are German Shepherds and Rottweilers.

At his training center — located in his backyard — Zehfuss can train dogs for a number of different objectives, including basic obedience, off-leash obedience, protective training and agility, but his favorite is protection training, where he teaches the dog security and protection measures. Each session is 40 minutes long, once a week, for eight weeks.

"I love puppy kindergarten, too," Zehfuss said. "It's puppies, you know. Who doesn't like puppies?"

Zehfuss said the costs for the courses vary based on the course and the age and size of the dog being trained. Prior to the classes with a new dog, Zehfuss said he sits down with the owners for an introduction and evaluation.

"I need to check the background, where the family stays and where the dog came from," he said. "I can

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usually tell how the training will go when the owner comes in with the dog on the leash. The owner is the most important aspect of training, the link (between the dog and the training)."

He said it is important that owners make a connection with their dog, while still remembering the dog is an animal, not a person or a kid.



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"Dogs pick up on attitudes, demeanor and emotions," Zehfuss said.

Susan Houser and her dog Bodhi, a mini Goldendoodle — a cross between a Golden Retriever and a Poodle — have been coming to the school for more than a year. She said she first brought Bodhi when the dog was 4 months old.

"He's training her and training me," Houser said. "It shows the dog who's the boss. When you show the dog you are boss, you have a calmer, more well-behaved dog."

Bodhi began with obedience training — a prerequisite course for any further training with Zehfuss — and is now being trained in agility. Houser said the classes have been instrumental in helping to develop her dog.

"When we first got her, she knew nothing and wouldn't mind at all," she said. "She used to be all over the house on everything. Now, she is just so overall obedient."

For more information on Zehfuss K-9 Training Center, visit [zehfussdogtraining.com](http://zehfussdogtraining.com).



MICHAEL POPE/STAFF  
Susan Houser leads her dog Bodhi through the agility course at Zehfuss K-9 Training Center. Bodhi, now almost 2 years old, began obedience training at 4 months, a prerequisite before dogs can continue their training at the center.