

Creating A Balanced Dog The Connie Tedford Way

By Cheryl Zappala, Staff Writer



Recently I had occasion to speak to Connie Tedford, one of our members in Arizona. I never knew her before, and many of you might not know her either. In speaking with her I found her to be one unique individual. At one time she was a professional cheerleader – maybe that's where her exuberance for this breed comes from! After college, she was an Investment Consultant for 23 years. Upon retiring she created an acre and half property to care for the dogs and established a cage-free resort for dogs, fully air-conditioned, with divided grassy play yards and a huge custom built pool designed to cater to both humans and dogs. But, as she will tell you, her greatest thrill is exhibiting her Saints. In fact, her Ch. Cache Retreat Alpine Trek won Best Stud Dog at the '09 National in Oregon. Connie also says she's never had a greater honor than to be on the end of the lead of her Cache Retreat boys. Her early mentors for her breed education were not only Ivan Palmblad, but Lynn Jech and Pam Hathaway as well.

Connie has never bred a litter, but Saints have been her passion since day one. Connie soon found her niche for the breed not just in the rescue arena, but in the rehabilitation aspect in an effort to create a balanced dog. She has quietly been keeping watch over our beloved breed, just going about her business of finding Saints all over the country that may be discarded, may have been misjudged, or may have been just terribly misunderstood, and then rehabilitating them to become a balanced dog. While she's not interested in breeding, she's quite adamant about dogs being bred appropriately after all of the ill-bred dogs that she's taken in and had to turn around, and states, "I'm so appreciative of those breeders who are doing it right." She now not only has run a very successful rescue and rehab operation for the last 12 years, but her knowledge and talents are used by various Sheriff Departments, shelter groups and veterinarians who know they can depend on her skills and experience to turn a dog into the balanced creature it was meant to be. She also gives private instruction.



A Christmas Card

Connie also has had a booth at the local Big Dog stores, and they kept inviting her back for many years until they closed their retail stores. She would spend the day handing out literature, bringing dogs for the public to see, hoping to educate well-intentioned folks on our breed so they don't make the mistakes that result in another dog coming into a

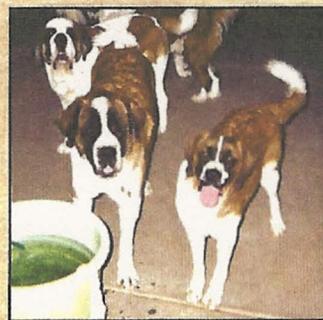
shelter. As you will see, her own dogs have helped greatly in this education.

Connie states there are four essential ingredients to creating a balanced dog: Exercise, Boundaries, Socialization, and Love. She adapts her methods to each dog, depending on its needs. She's used to dealing with shelter and rescue staff who are not adequately

trained and don't know how to assess a dog correctly. If they can't assess a dog properly, how can they go forward with these key ingredients? Usually these well-

intentioned folks are also understaffed and without adequate facilities. That's where Connie steps in, covering 13 states. She knows too that people unfortunately often lie when

they turn a dog in. These dogs are usually untrained, neglected, sick (which of course affects their behavior), blind (staff doesn't always recognize this either, so reactions are more pronounced), or possibly they have issues due to temperaments, but mostly it's environmental issues which often can be changed easily with a great deal of time, patience and "the Connie method." Some are dominant, some are shy – just depends on the damages that been inflicted by humans.

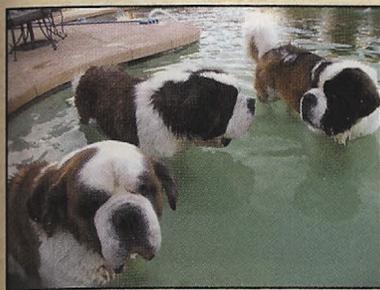


Kenji

Connie also takes in dogs that the authorities need to have cared for during court cases – cases of extreme abuse where charges have been filed and which can often be very lengthy. One example was a Police Department in Texas which contacted her because they had taken in a Saint who was very ill, had dwindled down to 34 pounds because of being locked in an abandoned apartment with no food and just the water that was in the toilet bowl! Connie immediately set up transport to get "Kenji" brought to her care, and she nursed that dog for a year and a half until the police could hunt down the folks who abandoned her and prosecute them. Eventually, Connie was able to find a home for the dog after she reached 84 pounds. Another example was when the County Sheriff Department called when they had received multiple complaints about a Saint "breeder" who had the dogs in miserable conditions. Connie went in, took



Always time to play!



dealt with about 1,200 dogs, mostly Saints, but some Saint mixes and other giant breeds, and has a very high success rate.

Her methods start with respect for each and every animal. She knows she's in it for the long run, and she makes a commitment. These methods work for her because she has a very controlled and specific environment. It takes a great investment of time, a tremendous amount of patience, an abundance of kindness and the proper facilities.



She is the "mama dog", the pack leader, and these critters are her pack, and they respect her in turn. Connie states emphatically that bored dogs are the devil's workshop. After she takes possession of

a Saint, she makes sure he or she is getting plenty of controlled exercise while she is evaluating the dog, learning more about the dog, and deciding how to handle this particular case. She says one of the biggest gifts to understanding why a dog behaves in any given manner is the ability to read their body language and know what the causes are for any particular behavior. The dogs are usually craving affection, and she doesn't use treats or clickers as a reward – just her unconditional love. There's no obedience testing, no CGC testing – these are not the average dogs with perhaps an issue – these are dogs which have been through a war.....and they're losing. Some have to be isolated for a short time; others can go right in with her 'pack' which helps the newcomer adjust (after being cleared health wise). During her observance, she sees who wants to say hello in a friendly way to the other dogs, if they invite play or are so withdrawn that it will take more time. She doesn't use chain link fencing; she uses wrought iron. She feels the sooner a problem dog can be with another dog, a dog already cleared by Connie, the better. If the newcomers are healthy enough, they're neutered right away, and then when fully recovered, they begin their "boot camp". Being surrounded by balanced dogs shows the newcomers what is expected of them and they learn more quickly by example.



Connie and Honor

"Tanner" is an example of the results of Connie's methods – "I got 'the call' from the county that they

were going to put this dog down, and if I wanted to see him, I had to be there by noon. He had already bitten three of their staff, who of course had no clue as to how to handle him. I jumped in the truck and headed down there. I went in with a leash and sat on the filthy floor outside his run and spoke to him, eye to eye, for a bit. He never made an aggressive move toward me, not one. His demeanor was kind, but his eyes screamed out in pain. I asked the staff to open his kennel so I could go in, but they refused for liability reasons of course. I said ok, then leave the area because I'm going in! They left; I went in and sat and talked with him again for a few minutes, telling him I was his last hope. I told him I understood that humans had done this to him and that if he wanted another chance, I would be there for him. I promised to protect him and never allow him to be abused again. He stood up and he allowed me to slip the lead over his head, and he followed me out to my truck, with the staff watching me in awe! Well, first of all, I didn't use a rabies pole, and secondly, I could see that he clearly had injuries to his face that would cause him to be defensive, and third, I could smell the ear infections that he had, so of course he had reacted to the pole when it touched his ears. After taking care of his wounds and infections, the rehab started, and when he was healed, he was so gorgeous and happy. He was great with all my other dogs and accepted any other human I told him was ok. I couldn't bear to part with him, and he spent the rest of his life with me until bone cancer took him."

When a dog has completed his rehab (there is no time frame or magic check list), and Connie is happy and confident with the results, then and only then will she consider placing the dog. By the time they have completed rehab, they're living in her house, fed together without incident and freely accepting visitors without retreating. This is how the normal balanced dog should be living anyway. Her policy is that people have to come visit the dogs so she can screen them, and lets the dog pick its new family. She won't place a dog that she feels is not right for that particular family, no matter how much they beg. She used to post the dogs that are available on her website, but she found that people make a better connection when seeing a dog in person, and that she was spending more time telling people why that particular dog was not a good match for their home environment, rather than just meeting the people, evaluating their home situation, wants and needs, and then telling them which dogs they have to pick from which were capable of fulfilling those expectations. She wants there to be a connection – after all, the goal is to make this their new permanent home, not to get the dog back in a couple weeks because it didn't meet their expectations.

Connie says she listens to her gut instinct in each case: "I recently took in a terrified bitch that was matted to the bone, from this family who claimed to love her so much! She had never been socialized,



Connie with Trek in Stud Dog Class



Nap time

and I put her outside with the playful crew, told her to 'go learn to be a dog'.....and she did. She would run with them, and then back to the patio, then she would start to chase them, and run back. By day five she was bowing to invite them to play and with my further attention to her, using the "ingredients", she was on her way to being a balanced dog. If I had kept her separated because of her fear, put her in the farthest rescue yard, she really would have withdrawn

did not know how to play with other dogs, but had been a house dog and was spayed. She was so frightened at first that she didn't even want to go to the door. I had several rehabbed dogs I knew were particularly good at inviting newcomers into their circle,

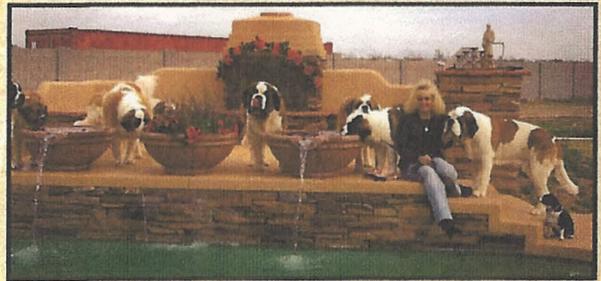
even further. Going to a shelter also would have been detrimental to her. My experienced house pack, which consists of my four intact males plus specific rehabbed dogs, had helped with the four key ingredients: Exercise, Boundaries, Socialization, and, of course, Love!"



As part of her contract on each dog, Connie hears back from those new "parents" of the dogs she's rehabbed, as well as those who she has guided over the phone and email who have contacted her about help for their dogs they got from somewhere else. One such person who had contacted her about a Saint they already had, and with whom Connie spent many hours trying to help them, had this to say: "George is doing so well since speaking with you a couple weeks ago. I found you at just the right time. We had had "George" for a few days, and the "buyer's remorse" and "Oh my god, what have I done", feelings set in! I felt that my three small children were at risk with his aggressive behavior, and I knew I had to act quickly. He is doing so much better since implementing the techniques you gave me. I had spoken with another trainer who wanted \$180.00 an hour, and she clearly did not have the understanding of the Saint Bernard breed as you do. I cannot believe what a totally different dog he's

become in just a week. He's getting along better with my other two dogs just by giving them something with the scent of the other dog to sleep with - pure genius, I never would have thought of that. I no longer fear him around my kids, which is huge! We have been massaging him, as you also suggested, to get him used to being touched in a

non-threatening way - he is quickly becoming submissive and very eager to please. I've had the same problems with all my other dogs, but it took me much longer to train them without you and your



expertise. We are so very grateful and appreciative of all the support that you give so willingly, you are truly gifted."

And from another family with a rehabbed Saint from Connie: "...in 1998 when we owned an Old English Mastiff, we heard about Connie from a business customer and wanted to meet her...she invited us to her home, and what we saw was amazing! She had 25 Saints from all over the country, living happily together -- some were show quality and some were backyard bred. She had air-conditioned kennels and large separate areas for the newly arrived. All were well behaved and obeyed her commands...her garage was packed with 50# bags of dog food, as well as treats....and in the corner of every room in her home were small stacks of dishtowels in case any visitors got drool on them. Mary, my wife, and I fell in love with a rescue named "Shawna" who had been a brood bitch in St. Louis, and when she was no longer of any use to the "breeder", had



been turned into the pound for disposal! Somehow Connie heard about her and managed to get the poor girl to Phoenix and kept her until we came along. "Shawna" has now been with us for seven years and is an important part of the family. In 2004, Connie was notified of a female Old English Mastiff who was blind, allegedly vicious and

her owners were going to put her down! Connie managed to save her, and we adopted her. This wonderful dog was not the horrible dog these owners had said she was, but a gentle loving dog that just needed someone to guide her around the house until she got used to her environment. "Tory" has graced our lives with love and affection for nearly four years. Connie has become our friend and truly an inspiration to us. It's a 24-hour job that she does on her own, no helpers.....she works with her dogs all day and maintains her 1 1/2 acre property impeccably; the home is immaculate, and there is no dog odor! Most of the dogs love the pool. She wants these dogs to go to their new homes with house manners, yard manners and social skills, on top of being healthy and obedient. Connie is dedicated and gifted, and we help in any way we can, including my company helping financially. But the money is insignificant to the work Connie puts forth; you cannot put a price on pure love."

When I asked why she continues to do this considering the time, money and energy she has to put into it, Connie tells me, "Because it's the right thing to do and they're so worth it. They don't call them Saints for nothing!" Connie continues with her goal of providing a peaceful and safe sanctuary for wayward souls to heal, and for that, we thank you, Connie Tedford!



Connie showing Stanford