

Call Of The Wild Takes Chef From Pastry To Pups

By Tanya Bordun



Deena Cooper is in the driver's seat - most of the time.

But there was a time when she lost her front seat to her four-legged friends.

She had left her truck running, containing five dogs, while dropping off a client's pet. One of the dogs took advantage of the opportunity and locked the door. At the time, Cooper panicked - worried about the dogs inside. Luckily, one of her assistants, Barbara Neray, brought her the spare keys and saved the day.

Although it wasn't funny then, she can now look back and laugh.

Cooper is the founder and owner of Deena's Doggie Services, located within her Village home near Eglinton and Bathurst. Her business offers behavioural consultation, obedience training, bed and breakfast and puppy classes.

For the past 12 or so years, Cooper has been steadily building a professional dog training and walking business that caters to some of Toronto's most successful business people and media stars.

"I'm training the owner to train the dog:" says Cooper.

On an emergency visit to veterinarian Martin De Forest at The Animal Clinic II, she recalls that De Forest noticed how well-trained her Rottweiler was and thought she had an "amazing touch with animals." He suggested she get into the business professionally.

But at the time, Cooper had decided to pursue a career as a pastry chef.

"I liked my caramel sauce too much", she said.

She began to dabble in dog training along the way, until she reached a crossroads in her life. Pastry or dogs. She chose the latter and hasn't looked back.

Her uncanny ability to empathize with dogs has been to her benefit. She says that by tuning into the owner and animal, she can train them to train the puppy.

"Dogs train on repetition, consistency, love and patience," she explains.

However, she adds, not every method works for each dog. Through her knowledge and resources. she can teach and assist in correcting puppy problems. It also helps that she has had a mentor for the past decade.

An astonishing fact about Cooper's business is that she has never had to advertise. All of her business has come from referrals from veterinarians and customers. She has had Pat Burns', veterinarian Karen Kennedy's, the Budman, Eaton and Ashby families', and Club Monaco designer Christine Ralph's dogs in her care.

A tip for pooch owners from Cooper is to show enthusiasm with your pet and make dog training more fun for your dog. "Just because you feed and walk your dog, doesn't mean you are going to have a bond."

She believes it is best to start training puppies early - within the first seven to 16 weeks. And although it is hard to teach an old dog new tricks, she says it can be done, but knows that it is hard to correct a bad habit. The trick to having a good relationship with dogs, says Cooper, is to "first discipline them and then spoil them."

Cooper says running Deena's Doggie Services requires a lot of mental energy, as a lot of intuition is needed to connect with these dogs.

Cooper admits that she loves her job, the people and animals she meets, and has enjoyed watching her business grow. Although she wouldn't trade her work for anything, she does miss being creative with cooking.

I still like my caramel sauce, but I don't have as much time to cook."