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HERMITAGE

Man says dog saved his life

By Monica Pryts
Herald Staff Writer

Ralph Gill of Hermitage will always remember June 22 as the day his neighbor's dog saved his life.

"Trixie is my lifesaver," Gill said of the 12-year-old poodle/collie mix.

Gill, 84, was on his tractor, mowing the backyard area he shares with neighbor Alexander Krotenak, Trixie's owner.

"Trixie always watches him," Krotenak said of whenever Gill is working outside.

Gill, a diabetic, remembers it was a very hot day and he suddenly didn't feel well. He doesn't recall exactly what happened next, but he's certain his blood sugar dropped too low too quickly.

The tractor hit a burning barrel and stayed there, continuing to run, and Gill was thrown to the ground.

"I just dropped off the trac-



Jason Kapusta/Herald

Ralph Gill, left, credits neighbor Alexander Krotenak's dog Trixie with saving his life.

tor," said Gill, adding that was the first time he'd had a serious problem with low blood sugar.

Gill lay in the grass on his back, drifting near unconsciousness. Trixie started barking and howling, leading

Krotenak, who was in his home, to believe she was being pestered by one of his four cats.

Krotenak went outside to see what was wrong with Trixie and found the dog barking near the tractor, where he saw

Gill, confused and incoherent. "The dog knew that Ralph was in great distress," Krotenak said.

He immediately called 911 and Gill was treated at home by paramedics. Other neighbors came to see what happened after they heard ambulance sirens.

They thought Gill had still been mowing the grass because they could hear the tractor running. The backyard area Gill was mowing is between a garage and a row of trees, hiding it from the neighbors' view.

When Gill came to, he was comforted to hear that Trixie, who has her own health problems, including congestive heart failure, had a hand in saving his life. Gill and his wife Betty usually care for the dog when Krotenak is out of town, so they get along well.

"They're good friends," Krotenak said.

Pet of the Week



Contributed

Thunder

Thunder is a 3-year-old male Labrador retriever mix who's good with children, cats and other dogs. He can be a little shy around men but gets over it quickly and is a good watchdog. He's neutered, vaccinated, heartworm-tested and dewormed. He's available for adoption from Animal Advocacy of Mercer and Crawford Counties, Sharon. For information, call Gerda at 724-347-3468. Lil' Rascals Pet Grooming in Hermitage will give Thunder a free grooming. Customers must bring adoption papers and make an appointment by calling 724-346-9319. For a list of other animals in need of homes, visit www.petfinder.com and type in your ZIP code.

Housebreaking means training — you

ONE of the great myths passed down from generation to generation of dog owners is that toy dogs are impossible to housebreak. A man called me just the other day to confirm that "fact."

He and his wife own a couple of dogs, one of them a toy, but they've found housebreaking an impossible task.

The first thing you have to understand is housebreaking is a people problem, not a dog problem. Your pooch is perfectly fine with when and where he goes. You're the one who wants it the way you want it. So you have to teach him.

The next thing you have to understand is punishment is not teaching. It's not his fault that your grand plan for the elimination of his waste didn't come to him in a dream, or a crystal ball.

You must first teach him



Matthew Margolis
Dogs, Cats & Other People

what you want, then correct — don't punish — him when he makes a mistake. Scolding, yelling, rubbing his nose in it — none of that accomplishes anything, and is likely to backfire with the creation of a fearful and possibly aggressive personality.

Housebreaking means the dog never eliminates in the house. Not even a little bit. Not even once in a while. Not on paper. Not on pads. Never. Nowhere. Nada. Capiche?

Housebreaking is an excellent idea and entirely possible, for all dogs, all breeds, big and small. Older dogs, and dogs with medical conditions or that are on medication are

the exceptions.

Know this going in: Housebreaking requires patience, fastidiousness and a plan.

The first part of that plan involves the formation of a strict Feed-Water-Walk schedule. This conditions your pup's body to eliminate according to your will and pleasure, so stick to it! No slacking, no excuses. This is your chance to make the rest of your life a whole lot easier, cleaner and aromatic.

The plan must also involve confinement. Baby gates and comfy crates are great. Free rein of the house simply won't work during the housebreaking phase. You can't correct a mistake if you're surprised by it after the fact. You have to catch him in the act.

The rest of the plan is all about correction and praise — absolute musts. When you catch him in the act, say "no,"

and then immediately take him outside and praise him when you get there, whether or not he goes. Praise is the reward. It motivates your pup to do whatever it is you want him to do — in this case, eliminate outside, and only outside.

For more tips on housebreaking, or for an age-specific Feed-Water-Walk schedule, check out "When Good Dogs Do Bad Things" at unclematty.com.

Dog trainer Matthew "Uncle Matty" Margolis is co-author of 18 books about dogs, a behaviorist, a popular radio and television guest, and host of the PBS series "WOOF! It's a Dog's Life!" Send your questions to dearuncle.gazette@unclematty.com or by mail to Uncle Matty, Box 3300, Diamond Springs, CA 95619.

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THINGS TO DO WITH YOUR DOG

Hillcrest Dog Park and Wellness Center in Hermitage hosts these events this week:

Monday, 6 to 7 p.m., puppy training with Roberta Knauf


Wednesday, 3 to 4 p.m., book club and tea. Bring your canine companion as the club has English Tea and discusses books whose main characters

are dogs.

Thursday, 6 to 7 p.m., pet grief support group, led by Arlene Rzepka of Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral Home and Crematory.

Saturday, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., pet chiropractic demonstration and adjustments for dogs, cats and other small pets with Dr. David A. Smolensky of Mars Family Chiropractic Center; 11 a.m. to noon, dog walking club at Hillcrest Memorial Park.

Info: hillcrestflynn.com or 724-347-5100



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