

TompkinsWeekly

CLOSE WINDOW



Trainer Offers Tips to Prevent Dog Bites

By Patricia Brhel

The Tompkins County Health Department responded to about 140 dog-bite reports in 2011. Because the third week in May is dog-bite prevention week, Caroline resident Russ Holler and the nonprofit organization Doggone Safe are planning to teach small children and their parents how to avoid the fears and potential tragedy that can result from an unsupervised interaction between a dog and a person.

Dog bites occur most often to joggers, children and to guests in a home. The problem is: If someone is bitten by a stray dog that cannot be identified, then painful and expensive rabies shots must be given. The best strategy is to avoid a bite.

Holler and Doggone Safe have some tips to keep children safe and allow dogs to retain their title as "man's best friend." Holler is a member of the association of pet-dog trainers and is owner of Russ Holler Dog Training. He has also raised nine Labrador retrievers and three German shepherds for Guiding Eyes for the Blind. He has

owned several pet dogs, large and small, throughout his life.

"The most important thing to do is to supervise and teach your child how to interact safely with a dog, and to socialize and train the dog," he says. "There's a window for puppies, from when they first leave their littermates and go to their human family, from about eight to 20 weeks old, which is crucial for socialization. Introduce the puppy to new people and situations and try to give him or her positive experiences. The more confidence a dog has, the less likely it is to bite out of fear. Dogs need to experience the world as a safe place."

Holler also advises people to get a puppy into a training class early on to teach proper manners. There are a number of good training programs in Tompkins County, and contacting the Tompkins County SPCA for information is often a good first step. Pick a program that emphasizes positive reinforcement, Holler says, and if you can't find a class to fit your schedule, opt for in-home training.

When training a dog, never punish it aggressively because this will

make the animal afraid of humans and thus more likely to bite. Reward your dog with treats, toys and praise when it does well. "Of course, you need to know your dog's temperament, too. Some dogs are more excitable than others, and all dogs need to learn impulse control. They need to not look at children as small chase-able prey. Children tend to move quickly and have high squeaky voices, which excites some dogs," says Holler.

Parents should teach children not to approach dogs they don't know. Children need to know that dogs don't appreciate hugs and, if they encounter a strange dog, they need to "be a tree"—no running or screaming. Children should stand still and hold their hands across their chest. "It can be frightening for a dog, and they can feel trapped when someone leans over them and hugs them, and a frightened dog is more likely to bite," Holler says.

Often bites happen when a child leans over a dog and puts his or her face close to the dog's mouth. It's better to rub or pat the dog on the chest. Teach the child not to

make direct eye contact with a strange dog, as the dog might consider that an act of aggression. If the dog is with its owner, ask the owner for permission to pet the dog, says Holler.

"Approach the dog from the side and crouch down a bit so that the dog doesn't feel threatened. People need to learn to read a dog's signs. Do they look relaxed? Are the dog's ears back? Is the tail wagging or tucked under the body? Look at the whole dog. If the dog looks tense, back off and give it some room," Holler says.

Spayed or neutered dogs not only won't contribute to puppy overpopulation, but such animals are not under the influence of surging hormones—therefore they are less likely to bite. The bottom line, Holler says, is that a dog can be a wonderful friend and family pet, but it must be supervised.

For more information, visit the Doggone Safe website at www.doggone-safe.com. Teach your child to be a doggy detective and read the clues that dogs give us—they communicate with their body language.

Code Red Robotics Competes in World Finals

By Tompkins Weekly Staff

Earlier this month, Code Red Robotics, the Ithaca High School's FIRST (For the Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology, www.usfirst.org) robotics team, attended the FIRST World Championships in St. Louis, Mo.

The team made a comeback after seeding 38th out of 100 teams in their division by being selected by the third ranked team to compete in the elimination tournament.

The alliance consisted of Code Red Robotics from Ithaca, Truck Town Thunder from Ortonville, Mich., and the Beach Bots from Hermosa Beach, Calif. This alliance, stretching through the continental United States, blazed through the competition, making it

all the way to the divisional finals. There were 400 teams competing in four divisions.

In the quarterfinals, Code Red defeated the defending world champion, as well as a FIRST Hall of Fame member. In the semifinals, the alliance upset the second ranked alliance, a powerhouse alliance with a combined record of six regional wins during the season.

Code Red was defeated in the divisional finals by the top ranked alliance. Nevertheless, all the hard work from the team certainly paid off, because Code Red finished in the top 1 percent of all teams worldwide, and made it farther than all other New York state teams.

Code Red Robotics is part of FIRST, an organization designed to

increase technology awareness. Each year, FIRST creates a new challenge for the teams to tackle. This year's competition is known as Rebound Rumble and is based on a game of basketball. Teams compete to utilize their 120-pound robots in order to score as many basketballs into four hoops at either end of the field as they can during a two minute and 15 second match. The higher the hoop in which the basketball is scored, the more points the alliance receives. The robots, at the end of the match, will also attempt to balance on bridges located at the middle of the field for the additional opportunity to earn bonus points.

This year, Code Red Robotics comprises 57 students and 20 professional mentors. They inspire

students through hands-on experiences, education, and opportunity in multiple fields of engineering, community service, finance, leadership, effective communication, and teamwork. Students lead the team in tackling the facets of operation, including organization, fundraising, public relations, engineering, and documentation.

In addition, the team focuses on providing for its supportive home community, and through community service, public demonstrations, and mentoring FIRST programs for younger ages, they inspire younger engineers. Recently, Code Red also won \$1,000 for selling more energy-efficient LED light bulbs than all other teams except one.

For more information go to www.team639.org.

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