

A dog gone good 20 years



Hour Photo/Alex von Kleydorff

Dog Gone Smart owner Chris Onthank spends time with some of the day care dogs at his business in Norwalk.

Dog Gone Smart celebrates 20 years of serving dogs

By KATHLEEN McWILLIAMS
SPECIAL TO THE HOUR

NORWALK — The concept of the dog being man's best friend is an idea not taken lightly at Norwalk's Dog Gone Smart Canine Center.

Started in 1993 by canine behavior expert Chris Onthank, the Dog Gone Smart recently celebrated its 20th anniversary and its many successes in the canine training, boarding and grooming world.

The Center, which began as a dog training business in the basement of St. Paul's on the Green church in Norwalk, has been located for the past 12 years in an 11,000 square foot building complete with a swimming pool, spacious play areas, training grounds, and grooming facilities. The larger space has allowed Onthank and his staff to expand the business offerings to meet demand for quality canine care, including grooming, day care, boarding, and extensive training programs.

Dog Gone Smart offers more than 20 classes for canines covering a diverse range of topics from swimming lessons to tracking and agility courses. Providing programs for dogs to become delta therapy dogs, the service that brings dogs to hospitals and rehabilitation centers in the area, as well as the basic behavioral training and socialization classes for puppies, the center is a hub of canine related activity.

For Onthank, working with dogs is in his DNA. As



Hour Photo/Alex von Kleydorff

Steven Cordoba helps Marty, a rescued Australian cattle dog, get past his anxiety to swim, during a training session in the pool at Dog Gone Smart.

a child he lived above the kennel house at Rose Farms Kennels in Greenwich, where his family trained and bred blood hounds and dachshunds. Both his aunt and his grandmother were American Kennel Club judges and Onthank himself has shown dogs throughout his life.

When Onthank first decided to open Dog Gone Smart he says "people did not believe it when I said I was going to open a doggy day care. People just thought of day care as a thing for children."

The concept of day care for dogs was nearly unheard of in the early 1990s and Onthank's business was only the second facility of its kind to open in the United States next to Yuppy Puppy in New York City, Onthank said. Innovation became one of Onthank and his team's trademark business strategies as they continually strive to bring new training

methods, technologies, and care methods to use at the Center.

"We are innovative through leadership, we're always thinking of the next step," said Dog Gone Smart's Marketing Manager Jaimee Kelsey.

Of these innovations was Onthank's idea of installing a pool for the dogs to learn to swim.

"Most people assume that dogs are born knowing how to swim," Onthank said. "That is not always the case."

Progressive and creative thinking are not the only hallmarks of Onthank's successful business. Onthank and his team are personally involved and acquainted with each of the dogs that frequent the center.

"We know every dog's name. Sometimes we don't even know the owner's name, we just call them 'Bruno's mom,'" Onthank said.

The familiarity between

monial of Onthank and his staff's devotion to the happiness and wellness of canines was the story of a dog that recently had to be put down. The dog's owner knew that Dog Gone Smart was her pet's favorite place and brought him to the Center to be put down.

While running Dog Gone Smart Canine Center and Dog Gone Smart Pet Products, Onthank also finds the time to give back to animal shelters across the U.S. and writes an informative blog for dog owners, CanineMaster.com.

As a serious dog lover, Onthank adopted his own dog, Dave, from a shelter. He works directly with the Pet Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) to provide assistance to troubled pets through free behavioral training and therapy and also featured homeless pets in the 2014 Dog Gone Smart Pet Products catalog. The catalog features products from Onthank's company Nano Pet Products, an endeavor he started after receiving positive reviews about the pet products being used at the Center.

The products are specially formulated to be easy to clean and functional for canine usage. A percentage of the profits from the products go directly to animal shelters to benefit dogs that are in search of loving homes.

"This isn't a store," Onthank said about the center. "This is your dog's home away from home and a place to make everyday life with your dog easier."

Another touching testi-

In Brief

Norwalk Chamber sets summer events

NORWALK — The Greater Norwalk Chamber of Commerce will its BBQ Beach Bash at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 29, at Calf Pasture Beach on Calf Pasture Beach Road. The price is \$45 and includes a drink. Registration is required.

To register or for more information, call (203) 866-2521.

NCC to hold pharmacy training

NORWALK — The Norwalk Community College Division of Extended Studies and Workforce Education is offering a 20-session Pharmacy Technician Training course, beginning Tuesday, Sept. 24. This course will meet from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The Pharmacy Technician Training program prepares students for entry-level positions in community and hospital pharmacy settings and for the Pharmacy Certified Technician (PCT) Examination.

Students will learn about prescription and over-the-counter drugs, compounding, calculations, legal aspects and parenteral administration of drugs and aseptic techniques, as well as topics in chemistry, anatomy, physiology and pharmacology. A strong background in mathematics is recommended.

Students must have a high school diploma or GED at time of registration. The tuition is \$699. To register, contact the Division of Extended Studies and Workforce Education at (203) 857-7237.

WBDC to hold annual breakfast

STAMFORD — The annual Women's Business Development Council's (WBDC) breakfast will be held at the Stamford Marriott on Thursday, Oct. 24.

"Connect - Grow - Influence: Women with Impact" will feature the growing effect of women business owners as decision makers, architects of change and economic influencers with a focus on women in diverse industries.

The panelists include Sarah Fisher, race car driver and CEO of Sarah Fisher Hartman Racing; Susan Duffy, executive director for the Center for Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership at Babson College; and Laurie Tucker, senior vice president of corporate marketing for Fedex Services.

The panel moderator will be the executive director of Connecticut's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, Teresa Younger.

Lt. Gov. Nancy Wyman is the honorary chairwoman and Denise L. Nappier, Connecticut state treasurer will be a guest speaker. Diana Sousa Jepsen, vice president of Corporate Communications of Cigna Corporation, will serve as mistress of ceremonies.

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