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Calming the savage beast made simple with massage

By Sherry Grindeland
Seattle Times Eastside bureau

A golden retriever melted in a puddle of fur and wagging tail. A large, mixed-breed dog was so relaxed he tried to convince his owner he was a lap dog, sprawling his upper body across her legs. A greyhound stared off into space, droplets of drool slowly dripping to the floor, while the teacher worked her magic along his rump.

Lucky dogs.

They were sampling Tellington Touch, an animal massage technique that is drawing dogs and dog owners by the dozens to classes at the Seattle/King County Humane Society in Bellevue.

Emily Keegans of Seattle, Tellington Touch practitioner, spent three hours Tuesday teaching humans the nuances behind the specialty massage. She worked her way down a lineup of eager dogs, helping their owners practice each movement.

Known by animal enthusiasts as Ttouch, the circular massage method is used to reduce stress, aggression, arthritis pain and motion sickness in animals. Adherents claim it calms cats and can turn barking dogs into model citizens.

"This isn't traditional massage because you don't need to understand anatomy," Keegans said. "It is a light touch, not deep massage. You're moving the skin, not the muscle, in circles."

The method was originally developed for horses by British horse trainer Linda Tellington-Jones in the early 1970s. But practitioners have successfully used the gentle, clockwise motions on zoo animals, including a python, and on pets such as rats and birds, Keegans said. Some Ttouch practitioners specialize in working with llamas.

The popular class, which the Humane Society repeats regularly, had a waiting list this week. Eight dogs and their owners sat in the front row in the Humane Society's training center/auditorium for hands-on demonstrations. Another six owners without their dogs observed from the back row.

Kristie Kuchan of Bellevue was in the front row with her dog, Dylan, who liked the massage so much he kept trying to crawl into her lap.

"I'm here because I have an older dog at home and I'm hoping Ttouch will help his arthritis," Kuchan said.

Tellington Touch Classes

Classes are scheduled regularly. To receive notification about the next one, call the Seattle/King County Humane Society education department at 425-649-7554 or visit the Humane Society's Web site at www.seattlehumane.org. Cost is \$35 for the three-hour session.

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Kris Johnson of Kenmore brought Katie, a 13-year-old Highland terrier, to help prepare the dog for upcoming dental surgery and for a move to Hawaii.

Jessie, the golden retriever who melted into a puddle of contentment, belongs to Kathy Hobson of Brier. The dog competes in agility trials and travels around the country playing flyball, a relay-race sport for dogs.

"Jessie was hit by a car and had a broken hip," Hobson said. "She goes to a chiropractor and an acupuncturist. I think Tellington Touch will help her with stress."

Keegans showed several techniques, including:

- "The Clouded Leopard" is so named because the hand rests on the body lightly, and the pads of the fingers are used to push the animal's skin in circles.
- "The Raccoon" uses the tips of the fingers with very light pressure.
- "Noah's March" is used at the end of sessions, done with a long sweeping motion down the entire length of the body, using the fingers and palms.
- "Ear Touch" includes sliding fingers down the animal's ears and using the fingertips to make tiny circles around the base of the ear.

Pressure should be light, said Keegans. "Your hand lands like a hummingbird as opposed to a duck."

It doesn't matter if the animal moves, stands still or lies down while the owner works on it, Keegans said. Work on one spot only long enough to overlap the circle by an inch or so, then move to another spot. Keep the sessions short, and if the dog is hyper, massage it for only a minute or two.

Not all dogs took to the massage instantly.

Ellie, a standard-size poodle, resisted Keegans' demonstration efforts. She preferred the snacks that came out of Keegans' treat pouch.

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