

# THE SILENT TREATMENT

Dog whisperer's success is in his unconventional approach to man's best friend



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

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In the 1995 book "The Horse Whisperer," the title character healed horses Zen-like, with his words and touch.

After many of local dog trainer Bill Albanese's clients drew similarities between his own methods and the story, he soon became The Dog Whisperer, making house calls to train dog owners as much as the dogs themselves.

"Dog training is truly human training," says Albanese, lamenting what he calls the Walt Disney syndrome in which dogs are man's best friend, animals talk in perfect English and understand human commands.

All too often, he says, owners will scold their dogs by saying "You know better than that."

The truth is, he says, they do not.

Albanese, 47, has been working with dogs for 16 years, originally as proprietor of Reville Complete Pet Care. Ten years ago, he began training dogs professionally under the moniker Don't Shoot the Dog. In 1997, he became The Dog Whisperer and is now easily recognized driving around town in his Mazda van decorated with black paw prints.

What he offers clients is one-on-one interaction with the dog, which he believes is a far more effective method than training school. Such group classes may teach commands such as sit or stay, but those are fairly generic and shallow lessons, he says.

He thinks it is best to observe the dog in its own environment. His first step is to take about 90 to 120 minutes evaluating the dog at its home. He then works one-on-one, reading the dog's behavior for another 10 to 15 minutes.

"All dogs are individuals and the environment

they live in makes them more individualistic," he said.

Albanese then orients the dog owner with how the dog processes orders and thinks. Often, he finds dog owners reinforce the very behavior they are trying to prevent without realizing it.

"I don't consider myself a dog trainer. I consider myself an animal behaviorist," Albanese is quick to point out. Among that animal behavior he studies are humans.

"I grew up fascinated by behavior at a young age," he said. "Why people throw tantrums and that kind of thing."

He was particularly interested in how learning occurs. With dogs, that learning has to happen in the absence of a language.

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As a family watches from a distance, dog trainer Bill Albanese evaluates a canine client. His business, The Dog Whisperer, uses an unconventional approach to dog training.

# Dog Whisperer

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The problems that result often include the dog not heeding commands, having too much energy or aggression or poor house training.

"What's wrong with the dog is it's a dog living with humans," Albanese said.

Domestication, he said, does not automatically teach a dog human logic.

"Almost all the problems are confusion-based," he said. "The confusion is when you put two species together,

in this case canine and human being. Usually the dog is confused, and the dog owner is frustrated."

Dogs could care less about consequences of their actions, he said. They like to live in the moment, and they want to be told what to do and want people to make sense to them.

"Dogs are only interested in what you want. They are not interested in what you don't want," he said.

Albanese does not use treats in his training. He advises owners there may be more work involved with his methods than other training styles, but he believes there are no quick fixes.

He also will assign homework for the owner, to practice what he calls rules of engagement, how to live with a dog and how to talk to it. Most of Albanese's clients are within a 100-mile radius of Santa Cruz, but he has done house calls as far north as Sacramento and as far south as San Luis Obispo.

He also offers boarding programs, but only for longer cases or problems too advanced for a novice dog owner to handle.

Not surprisingly, he tends to inherit dogs from time to time. He has five at home.

He also receives e-mails from around the globe, including Malaysia, the United Kingdom and the Canary Islands.

"It's interesting," he said. "I find it's the same problems exist everywhere."

## The Dog Whisperer

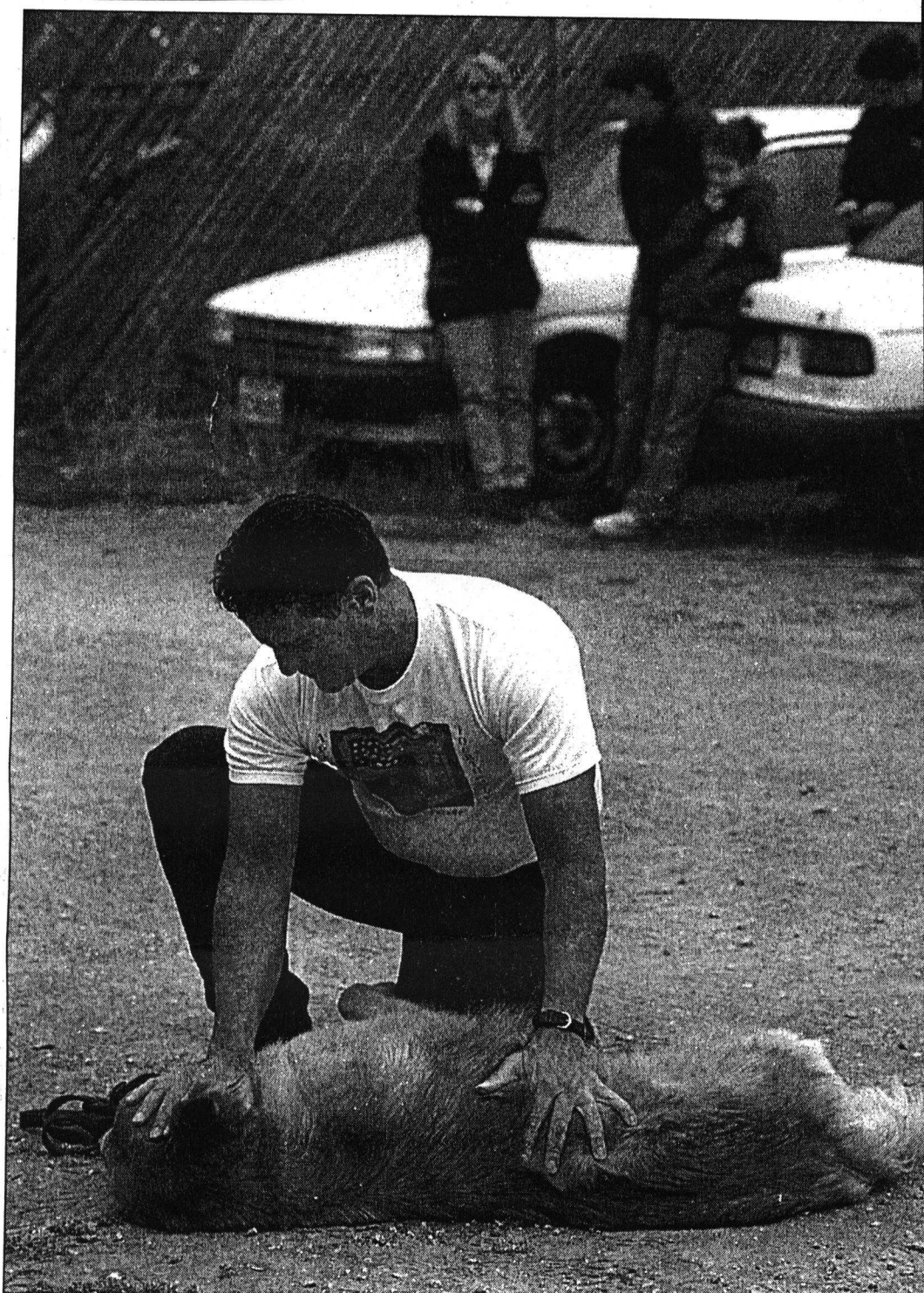
**OWNER:** Bill Albanese.

**WHERE:** Santa Cruz.

**SERVICES:** House calls for one-on-one dog training, including educational services for the leash holder as well.

**PHONE:** 475-7606.

**WEB SITE:** [www.thedogwhisperer.com](http://www.thedogwhisperer.com).



Bill Albanese works with a canine client recently.

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