

The Capital
Family Living



By Joshua McKerrow — The Capital

Erika Rollins of Annapolis greets Stella, a West Highland white terrier, as she holds her 6-week-old baby, Sadie.



HUSH, PUPPIES



Dog trainers help parents prepare pets for new babies

By **THERESA WINSLOW**
 Staff Writer

Make no bones about it, Erika and Jonathan Rollins didn't want any problems with the dogs when their first child was born.

So, the Annapolis couple hired a trainer who really delivered.

Kim Wendkos of Paws and Possibilities provided lots of tips on how to get the pets ready for the new addition to the household, and she's still helping out just after the birth.

The new parents live with Erika's mother and father and there are two dogs in the home — Stella, a 6-year-old West

"We wanted to be proactive. (The dogs have) just never been around a baby before. It was a lifesaver."

— **Donna Huebner**, mother of Erika Rollins, who along with her husband, Jonathan, worked with dog trainer Kim Wendkos of Paws and Possibilities to prepare for the arrival of a new baby.

Highland white terrier and Colby, a 2-year-old Catahoula leopard dog.

"They were well-behaved dogs, it was just a matter of how they'd react," said Erika, who gave birth to daughter Sadie six weeks ago.

She was specifically worried about having the dogs underfoot as she carried Sadie around, or their barking waking her or the baby.

"Kim taught me the difference between obedience and etiquette — having well-behaved dogs," Erika said. "And they definitely listened."

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DOGS

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Her mother, Donna Huebner, said she'd heard stories about people having to give up their dogs when a baby was born and didn't want to be in a similar situation. "We wanted to be proactive," she said. "They've just never been around a baby before. It was a lifesaver."

Wendkos started a six-session set of hour-long lessons about 1½ months before Sadie was born. Dog training for new parents is just one of the aspects of her business, but it's an important one, said the Arnold resident, who previously was a senior trainer working with dolphins at the National Aquarium in Baltimore.

A baby "definitely causes or can cause a lot of anxiety in dogs," she said. "It's difficult for people to know how to deal with it."

Ideally, Wendkos likes to begin working with expectant parents about halfway through a pregnancy so they're not trying to train their pet at the same time they're dealing with a newborn.

"We start slow," she said.

One of the steps is getting dogs accustomed to the sounds a baby might make by having parents play a recording.

Wendkos rewards good dog behavior with a treat. She corrects

dogs when they're exhibiting undesirable behavior by pairing a consequence, such as squirting a water bottle, with the action in question.

"Ninety-five percent of training is positive reinforcement," she said. "The training is pretty easy. It's just a matter of knowing what to do and practicing."

Baby steps

For Tomi and Ronnie Choe of Arnold, the decision to contact a dog trainer came down to a growl.

When their 3½-year-old mixed breed, Otis, started to growl at Ronnie, they contacted Linda Stallings of Chesapeake Dog Training.

"I'd noticed the last couple weeks, he seemed protective of me," said Tomi, who is due later this month with the couple's first child.

Stallings made a house call this past weekend and worked with Otis on some basic obedience.

The idea was to teach the dog new routines so that when the baby comes, he'll be more comfortable, said Stallings, who is a former animal keeper and operations manager at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore.

"All dogs are different," said Stallings, who like Wendkos is a parent and dog owner. "A lot of it is figuring out the personality of the dog and how they're



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Dog trainer Kim Wendkos of Arnold watches as Erika Rollins' mother, Donna Huebner, uses a clicker to work with Stella, a West Highland white terrier, and Colby, a Catahoula leopard dog.

motivated."

By the end of the visit, Stallings had Otis coming to Ronnie when called, for which the dog received a Milk-Bone treat. "Most people know a lot about training and dogs, they just need a little reassurance," Stallings said. "As humans we try

to make things too complicated. Dogs are simple."

Stallings recommended Tomi and Ronnie work with Otis a couple of times a day, for a few minutes at a time. She's not planning another visit now that Tomi's so close to her due date, but she'll return after

the birth if needed.

"In a way, I'm glad Otis growled at Ronnie, because we called (Linda)," Tomi said. "It worked out and was a blessing a disguise."

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