

# Balance

a magazine for montana women

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## Dances with Dogs

Local dog trainer Nancy Tanner offers new leash on life, facilitating strong relationships between canines and their owners

## Profile:

Finding a comfortable pose with Margaret Burns Vap, cowgirl yogini



Nancy Tanner works with one of her dogs at the dog agility barn at the Gallatin County Fairgrounds.

# Dances with Dogs

BY MICHELE CORRIEL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY THOMAS LEE

## Local dog trainer Nancy Tanner offers new leash on life, facilitating strong relationships between canines and their owners

**F**OR NANCY TANNER IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DOGS. It's her reason for getting up in the morning and her inspiration for making it through the day.

And it's a good thing, too, because Tanner's business, Paws & People, depends on it.

With puppy classes, private training sessions for behavioral problems, and her own competitive agility training, Tanners's daily life revolves around her canine companions.

"I've always had dogs in my life," Tanner, a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, says, "and I can't imagine not having them there."

Tanner believes that having a dog should be fun. But in order to have fun, dogs and their owners need to put time into building a lifelong bond.

"The ultimate in working together is building a really strong relationship with your dog," she says. "I found that a lot of people didn't have the building blocks for that kind of relationship. If you don't have a trusting puppy relationship there are limits as to what you can do with your dog."

So she decided to specialize in puppy training.

Tanner isn't like the trouble-shooting Nanny from television who comes into the house and solves all your behavioral problems. Her clients come to her. They learn how to work with their dogs using strategies that work.

In one of the barns at the Gallatin County Fairgrounds, Tanner along with Ocean, Seeker and Story, her border collie/border collie mixes, run through a maze of agility training exercises – just for the fun of it.

One at a time they blast, full speed, down one side of the stalls, through a tunnel, up and down an A-frame, across a teeter-totter, over a low beam and into the main area of the back barn, where Nancy throws a toy for them as a reward, all in about five seconds. The dogs, tongues hanging, eyes bright, couldn't be happier.

And that's what it's all about. Working dogs working.

When Tanner first started Paws & People, she knew she wanted to train dogs.

"But once it really caught on, I needed to know something about running a business," she says. "I needed to know about technology, advertising, marketing ... things I'd never really considered. But I like the hands-on stuff, working with people and puppies, the best."

About a year ago, Nancy Tanner and Story made national television when they appeared on the Martha Stewart Show (you can watch it on youtube.com at this link <http://bit.ly/cj7vax>). Tanner dances with Story in what she calls "freestyle," linking a series of behaviors (or tricks) to music, and receives the Golden Bone Award from Martha Stewart herself.

"One thing I discovered about myself from that is I don't like it," Tanner says. "I shy away from the big media. I like my classes with my puppy people. I love to train. If I was a dog I'd be a border collie. I'm like, 'work me, work me!' I love working with dogs and figuring out how to deal with difficult behavioral issues. It's just so rewarding to see the progress that can happen."

Linda Karell has taken two puppy classes, and two freestyle classes. She and her dog, a Golden Doodle, are currently enrolled in a Canine Good Citizen testing class. *continued*

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## Dances with Dogs

"When I first got my dog (I'd never had a dog before) I wanted someone who would work with the dog and not against the dog," Karell says. "Nancy was the only name that kept coming up. She is spot on with dogs."

By being very observant, Tanner sees things that other people don't see.

"She can watch a dog while he's playing with other dogs, and tell you what the dog is doing and why," Karell says. "So when she's working with you, she's working with you and your dog ... she sees precisely how the dog is behaving."

Tanner's love for all things puppy comes across in every class she teaches.

"When I first brought my Golden Doodle in to a class the main thing she did was train both of us together," Karell says. "She showed me how to shape, capture and reward behavior. The most important thing for me was learning to be consistent."

Another aspect of Tanner's expertise is her knowledge about the nature of each breed of dog. By understanding the nature of a hunting dog, or a lap dog, or a working dog, she can take advantage of certain inbred behaviors.

"Nancy's got all the classes and certifications, she's got the background, the training and the knowledge, and that helps her evaluate the dog," Karell says. "One time we were in a free-style class, and you really have to develop the dog's attention to you so they're doing what you're asking them to do, and Nancy walked onto the field with a dog who wasn't doing anything for the owner. When Nancy worked with the same dog that dog did somersaults for her."

It wasn't magic.

Nancy Tanner poses with three of her dogs. Tanner and her dog Story (top dog) were featured on the Martha Stewart Show last year.



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