

FEATURE ARTICLE

TDV Puppy Prep School Graduates Its First Class

Deb Helfrich

TDV recently capped off its first session of the new Puppy Prep School course with a graduation ceremony at Starr Farm Nursing home. A class of five puppies and their handlers strutted their stuff for an audience of elders, staff, and TDV officers—demonstrating basic obedience and manners, as well as performing their own special tricks. Following the demonstration and awarding of graduation certificates by TDV's founder and president, Steve Reiman, the puppies and their handlers visited with elders.

After many years of requests for such classes, Puppy Prep School marks TDV's first venture into offering training courses. This 6-week course, for puppies aged 8 weeks to 4 months, builds a foundation for future therapy dog work by working on social skills with people and other dogs, providing careful and positive exposure to a wide variety of new experiences, and learning some basic obedience and manners. "The curriculum and approach was designed to give participants a solid foundation of how to work with their puppies, and develop a fun, positive working relationship. We involve the community by inviting special guests and encourage the idea of giving back to the community by holding the graduation in an actual facility. Puppies get real paws-on experience and lots of individualized instruction." said instructor and TDV VP Deb Helfrich.

The first class was offered through the Essex Recreation Department. The class featured different guests each week to expose the puppies to strangers and practice their social skills on a wide variety of people. Guests included celebrity Rusty Dewees (The Logger), Dave Dewey experienced canine police handler and president of the VTPCA) and his 2-year old daughter, Colchester fireman Joe O'Connor (in full fire gear!), and our own officers Beth Alpert, her children, Steve Reiman, and Christy Hollstein.

Future classes are planned for the fall.

Special thanks to TDV's official puppy class assistant, Connie Barrett—her help planning for and during each class was invaluable to making the course a success!!

Jack Russell pup Stella plants one on visiting fireman Joe O'Connor.



Top to bottom: Shep mix Tacoma practices a wheelchair greeting with her handler, Steve Reiman, and Deb Helfrich; Officer Dave Dewey and his daughter try to distract Irish Wolfhound puppy Sean during recall practice; Mastiff puppy Dakota gently greets guest Rusty Dewees.