
Dear Dog Lover,

While winter has us, we're enjoying outdoor activities like mushing and skijoring with our dogs, or just strolling along a beautiful winter trail. The first part of our **mushing seminar** was a lot of fun, the students enjoyed learning about all the equipment, making their own first ganglines, and driving, not just riding, a sled pulled by a snowmachine over a trail that we call "Miniature Iditarod" around our facility. Turns, ups and downs in all combinations can make the recreational musher feel like driving the Happy River Steps or Rainy Pass, and depending on the snow/ice condition, we also have hard packed, sugary, or icy trails. We're all looking forward to Sunday, mushing part 2, when we focus on the dogs themselves: After watering them, the students will get warm with one more sled driving training pulled by snowmachine, then hook up their two-dog teams to navigate our "Miniature Iditarod Trail".

We postponed our **Skijor Seminar** to one week later than originally planned, **now on Sunday, March 1st**. It looks like we're getting more snow for our trail, which will be nice. We still have openings for any skier who wants to involve his/her dog in this outdoor activity!

We're proud to announce our own **economic stimulus package**! We have cut the prices down for our **Play'N Fun Doggy Daycare**, and added one new option: the monthly enrollment! All prices are for daycare Mon-Fri, 7am-8pm. Ask us about any times beyond this range.

The new daycare fees are (until further notice):

Full Day single: \$35; second dog \$30

Half Day single: \$25; second dog \$20

Punch Card Full Days: \$299 for 10 times; multi-dog household: \$299 for 11 times

Punch Card Half Days: \$199 for 10 times; multi-dog household: \$199 for 11 times

Monthly Enrollment: \$199 for as often as you want in one month

Our monthly story at the end of this email: Mushing With Snowshoes

Enjoy the winter,

Claudia

Below you'll find:

- 1) Dates and times of upcoming classes**
- 2) How to sign up for the classes**
- 3) Information on the Open Play Times**
- 4) This month's story: Mushing With Snowshoes**

1) DATES AND TIMES OF UPCOMING CLASSES:

Skijor Seminar Mar 1st:

Instructor: Kirsten – member of the US National Skijor Team

Sunday, Mar 1st, 10am-2pm: Theory and practice – for intermediate skiers
Registrants can already ski the trail any time before the seminar, daylight only.

Behavior classes starting Mar 4th/5th:

Instructor: Claudia

Most classes will run for seven weeks, with a break on Mar 25/26 and end Apr 22/23.
High School will run for 4 weeks, have a break on Mar 25th, and end Apr 1st.

Wednesday 5-6pm: Puppy 2 - Kindergarten

Wednesday 6:15-7:15: Elementary School

Wednesday 7:30-8:30: High School-CGC (4-week course)

Thursday 5-6pm: Puppy 1 – Preschool (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Thursday 6:15-7:15: Overflow Puppy 1 – Preschool or Foundation Class

Thursday 7:30-8:30: Foundation Class (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Agility classes starting Apr 4th:

Instructors: Claudia/Kat

These classes will run for six weeks, with a break on April 25th, and end May 16th.

Saturday 10-11:15am (including set-up): Agility Puppy/Beginners FULL

Saturday 11:15-12:30pm (including set-up): Agility Puppy/Beginners FULL (we take waiting list positions)

Saturday 12:15-1:30pm (including set-up): Agility Intermediate

Lunch break: 1:30-2:30pm

Saturday 2:30-3:45pm (including set-up): Agility Intermediate

Saturday 3:30-4:45pm (including set-up): Agility Advanced

Saturday 4:45-6:45pm (including set-up): Agility Advanced Trial

Behavior classes starting April 6th:

Instructor: Claudia

All classes will run for seven weeks and end May 18th.

Monday 6:15-7:15pm: Puppy 1 – Preschool (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Monday 7:30-8:30pm: Foundation Class (first week: 6-8:30pm without the dogs)

Also coming up 2009:

Rally College starts May 7th.

Our outdoor agility classes will start May 30th.

2) HOW TO SIGN UP FOR THE CLASSES:

It's easy now!!! On our webpage www.bettercompanion.com, use the menu bar on the left. You'll find a button

"Classes", with the subtitle "Registration", which brings you directly to the **one registration form for ALL classes**. After clicking "enroll" at the end, you'll get to the pricing and payment page, which explains all payment options, policies, and allows you to pay online, too. You can also check out the pricing page first, to learn about prices, payment and cancellation policies.

Please note **our registration policy:** Only the payment will hold your spot. Spots are reserved in the order we receive payment for them. **Always sign up for the class you want to join**, even if it could be full. Only the payment will keep you on the waiting list, in case somebody else drops out before the class starts. If I can't get you into that class, your payment will either be used for the next available class, for another class you wish to join instead, or fully reimbursed!

Puppy 1 Preschool clients, please remember you can also purchase the **Puppy School Packet**, including P1 and P2 class. You only have to commit to the seven weeks of P1 class, and will receive a voucher for P2, valid for 1 full year! For P2 voucher holders, the voucher will be your payment. After you filled out the registration form, you can email me the number of the voucher, mail the voucher to us or drop it off at the facility.

Reserve your spot! Your payment is never lost, even if the class is already full. Your payment will 1) save you a spot at the class, or 2) save you a spot on the waiting list, or 3) can be carried over to a later class, or 4) can be fully reimbursed if I couldn't get you in the class you chose, or 5) can cause me to open an overflow class ☺. Just as a note: I sometimes get up to three dogs per class moved in from a waiting list before the class even started. **We now can take credit card payments over the phone and at the facility.**

3) SOCIAL HOUR - OPEN PLAY TIMES:

Come with your dog for one hour of dog play and dog owner social time. Each dog must be supervised by an adult handler, one dog per handler only. First-timers: bring your vaccination papers, we want to see them!

Fee: \$7 at the door, punch card \$35 for 6 visits. Vaccinated dogs only (5-way/DHPPi, dogs over 6 mo: Rabies, Bordetella). We also recommend having the dog dewormed or a fecal sample checked.

Every Tuesday AND Friday:

5-6pm: toy and small dogs up to 30#

6-7pm: puppies and adult dogs 40-60#

7-8pm: Adults over 60# (8 dogs maximum)

8-9pm: Adults over 60# (8 dogs maximum)

If the discrepancy between sizes/temperaments of dogs is too big within one group, we will either have a special section fenced off for the smaller/ more timid dogs of the group, or divide the dogs into indoors and outside play (if weather permits). This is to assure that everybody has fun and nobody gets overpowered.

We also give Canine Good Citizens a discount:

Is your dog a Canine Good Citizen? If your dog passed the CGC-test within the last 3 years, we'll give you a \$5 discount on your punch card for Open Play Times!

You can check the web page www.bettercompanion.com for info on classes, facility, and schedule, see photos, read testimonies from other students, print out the registration form...

Or contact us by email or phone (see below).

4) MUSHING WITH SNOWSHOES

It's all because deep down I'm lazy. I wanted to exercise my dog with more miles than what I was willing to walk, and I wanted to get further faster. I also wanted to allow my dog to travel at her natural speed, which is trotting or even loping, not just strolling along with me, the slow human. I already did that in the summertime, through bicycling. But how could I do it in the winter? I tried skiing, but because I was using the cross country tracks, not a skating lane, it was a disaster. The dog pulled to the right and left, and I fell to the right and left. I tipped over, trapped in the tracks, like a tree. I didn't know better at that time, and there were no skating tracks available, so I skipped the idea of skiing. I turned to the sled instead.

I only had one dog at this time, Maggie, supposedly a Husky/Shepherd-mix from Greece. Having been a stray dog, she definitely had the endurance of a sled dog, and the right shape and size, too. Already familiar with the mushing scene and knowing some of the mushers personally, I'd travel to the sprint races with them, help them handling their dogs, and then after the race, I'd offer (or ask) to take one retired sled dog together with my dog, and if I'd get a sled, run them around the race track. Sometimes I'd take another pet dog, and soon my own dog was smart enough to teach the other dog how to 'line out', run in front, go right or left (Gee or Haw), but then let the other dog do the pulling work. :-)

Not much later I ended up borrowing three retired sled dogs, and entered the 4-dog division of the races, at least to pay my share of using the trail - not to win anything. Still, I never had my own sled. To cut the next years short, I was fascinated by the sport, wanted to handle for a kennel in Alaska, which ended up being a Yukon Quest musher, helped training dogs in 8-10 dog teams, and continued enjoying the smaller teams when training puppies and weight pullers. After dislocating my shoulder twice, my confidence dwindled, and I went back to three and four dogs in a team, rather older and calmer than young and exuberant.

That's where I'm now. I have two retired sled dogs at age 8, one who's 3 years, and my pet dog Sally, who can lead, but refuses to pull. With that small team and my own equipment (lots of it from my husband, retired from Iditarod), I still experience in a smaller version all the things I heard about from other mushers, either on camping trips, or in races, from a short mid-distance 40-miler all the way to the Iditarod. I enjoy it, and it's way less stressful than being in one of those races with a larger team.

Last month we went to a cabin, from where we wanted to access a well-groomed trail system. We have two options, and tried them both. Our preferred route would be to go directly from that property through a tract reserved by the borough for that purpose to the existing trail. That's about 1 mile of trail breaking, because at this time, nobody else is using that tract. We started with snowshoes only, cutting out trees, then another time came back with the sled. It had snowed again, and the dogs had to pull through 8" of fresh snow. The sled didn't like the deep but narrow snowshoe tracks from last time, and kept tipping from one side to the other. It was almost better without the old tracks, but then the dogs fell through the snow too deep. So, I took the snowshoes out of the sled and walked in front of the dogs, who pulled the empty sled. When we turned around, the dogs had it easier, and I went behind the sled for short stretches (see picture). We got maybe 1/2 a mile done, more trail is still waiting to be broken.

The other option is to follow the road which is a dead end and hardly used, then slide down a steep edge into the swamp, and meet the trail on the other side of the swamp and a little creek. The road was a great ride, almost like a sprint trail. The edge was ugly, and me being a chicken, I'd have untied all the dogs, let the sled slide down alone, and then hook up the dogs again at the bottom. My husband Frank felt pity for me, plus we heard about traps in that area, so we left the dogs safely tied to the sled, and Frank drove the sled down the bank into the swamp. I followed, hardly being able to keep my footing on that steep hill. I can't imagine how the mushers get down the Happy River Steps with a 16-dog team! Through the swamp, Frank skied in front, making a trail my dogs could follow. He

crossed the creek and connected us to the existing trail.

Sally, my pet dog in the team, was equipped with fleece booties. It was a little under zero degrees, where she runs better with booties, not getting the cold snow in her webbing. Sure enough, she also is the only dog who finds the spot of water along the creek and instead of jumping over it, walks right through it. As soon as we were on the trail, I stopped my team and checked on her booties. Within minutes, they were frozen solid into thick ice and snow sculptures, almost immobilizing the toes inside. I needed to rip them off her feet, let her feet dry off by running her bare, and then put on new booties later down the trail. I was glad I had prepared extra booties and had them with me in the sled. Now I understand why fleece is not the material used in the Iditarod. Carrying 16 sets or even more of those wet, then frozen booties, is as much space consuming as it's adding weight to the sled! I'll need to take them in at home, thaw them out in the sink, then string them together and hang them up close to the woodstove to dry them out, before packing them again.

So, if you think you need a big team and lots of dogs to experience mushing, think again! It really only takes one own dog, or two to four dogs, to have all the fun (and trouble) an Iditarod musher experiences. ☺

Enjoy the winter!

Claudia



Mushing with Snowshoes; Jan 09; Caswell

You don't need a dog truck! Apr 08; Hatcher Pass

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We hope that you enjoy receiving monthly class information from The Better Companion. If you prefer not to receive future emails, please send a little note to unsubscribe.

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