Dog Trainer and TV Star Victoria Stilwell Live at The Z Review



by Melissa Viera

Last Saturday, the 19th of November, pet lovers gathered at The Zeiterion Performing Arts Center for a special event with famous dog trainer Victoria Stilwell, where she demonstrated her positive dog training methods using local rescue dogs. Positive dog training involves rewarding a dog for desired behaviors. “A reward can be a treat, toy or game,” says Victoria Stilwell. No force, yelling or yanking on the leash is used like in some of the more traditional methods.

If you watch animal planet you have probably seen Victoria helping families with their difficult dogs on the series *It’s Me or The Dog*. Fans of the series are familiar with Victoria’s wit and style. She brought the same unique personality and positive methods to the stage for a show that had the audience both laughing and learning. The methods she uses are practical for any pet owner. Positive dog training focuses on understanding how dogs learn and rewarding them for behaviors instead of using force.



Born and raised in Wimbledon, England, Victoria Stilwell began her career with dogs as a dog walker. She made a point to express how much the first group of dogs she walked meant to her. Before she realized she wanted to be a dog trainer Victoria was pursuing a career in acting. The audience laughed as she showed a clip from her acting career where she was less than in the spotlight.

Victoria's calm and gentle techniques proved to be effective as she worked with dogs on stage from Forever Paws Animal Shelter located in Fall River. She had the dogs responding within minutes, while the audience watched with admiration. The dogs, some still in need of forever homes, had various behavior and training issues, which Victoria demonstrated positive ways to solve. Among the dogs was a food aggressive German Shepherd. The shepherd, a large male dog, had been known to growl and snarl when he is disturbed while eating. Victoria presented him with an empty food bowl and tossed food in by hand as the shepherd looked up at her. She explained that this approach takes the value away from the bowl and gives the person feeding the dog value.

Frosty, a three-legged American Staffordshire mix, wagged his tail in delight as Victoria played a scent work game with him on the stage. Victoria set down cardboard boxes, one with a hidden treat, while explaining that scent work is something anyone can do with their dogs. After speaking about the sensory abilities of dogs, Victoria showed the audience how well dogs use their scenting abilities with a brief demonstration of canine scent work. Frosty was not slowed down by his handicap as he proceeded to find the hidden treat with enthusiasm.

Canine nose work, also known as scent work, is a sport for

dogs where they use their nose to find target odors. The sport is similar to detection work. The National Association of Canine Scent Work (NACSW) sanctions trials where dogs search for odors like Birch, Anise and Clove.

Victoria Stilwell captured the audience's interest through out the event. Her fun personality seemed to be contagious. Pet owners, families and professionals can appreciate Victoria's skill and methods. "It was a great show, Victoria helps people understand why science based positive methods are the best way to train your dog and have a great relationship with them," says local dog trainer Cheryl Viera of Emma Marie's Daycare and Grooming in Mattapoisett.

The event was entertaining, and it also put the attention on the issue of dogs being surrendered to shelters because of behavior and training problems that could be solved through a positive approach. Forever Paws Animal Shelter gave Victoria a special thanks after the event with a bouquet of flowers. Fans had the extraordinary opportunity to meet Victoria up close for autographs and questions. Victoria Stilwell is just as good-humored and knowledgeable in person as she appears to be on the series *It's Me or The Dog*.