



Unleashing Potential, a Dog at a Time

A Mineola resident helps pet owners and their dogs thrive

DOG TRAINER ABBY MCMILLIN is not in Kansas anymore. Or South Korea, for that matter. Instead, she's set up her Triple H Dog Training school in the Pine Mills area of Mineola.

Her path has not been short or direct, but she's collected winning dog whispering techniques in its detours. The stacks of blue ribbons she and her students have collected are proof of the passion that drives her to help people and their pets.

McMillin was born in Kansas to an Army family, and her mom and dad decided to move the family to South Korea when she was 5 and her brother was 2, as her mother still had family there.

For as long as she could remember, McMillin dreamed of attending Kansas State University to study veterinary medicine. After 12 years in South Korea, her Army major dad accepted a billet at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 2010 to help acclimate her back to American culture. McMillin started her sophomore year of high school in Kansas and was accepted into KSU after graduation.

Since she was a toddler, McMillin says, almost every photograph of her as a child has an animal in it. That love transitioned into a high school job at the veterinary clinic in Leavenworth, which had an animal shelter attached to it. She worked the front desk but was also responsible for caring for and feeding the animals. During that time, a German shepherd named Taz grabbed her attention and tugged at her heartstrings. Taz had

been badly abused. Because of this, he'd become extremely aggressive and was virtually unadoptable. McMillin saw that Taz's issues stemmed from sheer terror. She aimed to befriend him and help him overcome his trauma. McMillin worked to earn Taz's trust day after day, week after week, until she was finally able to pet and put a lead on him. This enabled more training, and eventually Taz was adopted.

McMillin was overjoyed, and the clinic's animal behaviorist took notice. He saw her determination and budding ability and took her under his wing as a mentee. He taught her how to identify the causes of certain behaviors and ways to treat them with positive reinforcement techniques. Since then, nonaversive techniques have become the hallmark of McMillin's training programs. She never uses shock collars, choke collars or any other physical punishment. Instead, she captures and marks the behavior she wants an animal to repeat using positive reinforcement such as toys and treats.

In 2015, while she was still in college, McMillin founded Triple H Dog Training with a mission to help pet owners. She received her bachelor's degree in animal science with a pre-veterinary medicine option and a minor in pet food science. With degree in hand, she weighed her options. Continuing on the veterinary track would be costly, but her knowledge of animals and minor in food science made for an easy entry into a career in the food industry. She was hired in quality assurance



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1. Abby McMillin sits on a barn hunt setup with her dogs, from left, Hime, a 10-year-old Catahoula leopard dog; Nox, a 1-year-old golden retriever; Apollo, a 3-year-old golden retriever; and Haru, a 9-year-old border collie.
2. Haru and Apollo show off a small sample of the ribbons each has won in competition.



at Cargill in Nebraska City, Nebraska, shortly after graduation, and eventually moved to Columbus, Nebraska, as a quality assurance supervisor. The latter post is where she met Nick McMillin, who was in operations at Cargill. Their friendship grew into a romance, and they married in 2020.

Abby and Nick were offered positions with John Soules Foods in Tyler in October 2021. But this past summer, with Nick’s encouragement, Abby decided to pursue her dog training business full time in Mineola, also allowing her to devote more time to their 1-year-old son, Levi.

McMillin has been active with her canines in each community she’s lived, participating in dog shows and various sporting events. She’s studied clicker training (another positive reinforcement style) and canine fitness, competes in agility training, has training in animal therapy and has rehabilitated injured animals. In some of these specialties, she is pursuing certificates. She plans to offer dock diving classes this summer.

Clicker training is McMillin’s main method for training dogs, but she’s used it with other animals as well, such as kangaroos, otters and monkeys. She’s even trained her own cat by clicker.

“Clicker training is very versatile and can be used on almost any species of animal,” she says. “I really encourage people to learn about it, or at least give it a try.” She says she gets great satisfaction from seeing a change in pet owners’ attitudes toward training when they discover it’s not exhausting and is fun to see their pet’s progress. “I try to make it fun for both the owner and the dog,” she says. “That way they are always looking forward to learning.”

She offers private and group sessions in obedience, agility, canine good citizen and trick classes as well as service dog

training and the ever-popular puppy training. She continues to work with reactive or aggressive dogs to modify their behavior, just like she did at the start of her journey, with Taz.

McMillin is certified as an American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen evaluator, so she can test and help students achieve titles with their dogs. She also teaches beginning and advanced classes in barn hunt, a fairly new competition sport. It’s one of the fastest growing dog sports in the U.S. and focuses on the natural instincts of canines to seek out rodents. Dogs have been used to hunt and eradicate vermin for centuries, from wartime trenches to helping farmers keep barns pest-free.

Barn hunt is open to any breed type and is a great low-impact sport for older dogs. The course setup includes hay bales and tunnels, and the dogs hunt to find live rats hidden among the bales inside tubes. To add to the challenge, there are several decoy tubes, some empty and some that include rat bedding. In a timed event, the dog must ferret out the correct tube with the live rat and then give a signal to its handler. Great care is taken to treat the rats humanely, and they are in secure, dog-proof tubes. While the hide-and-seek unfolds, the rats are usually quietly enjoying treats like Cheerios.

McMillin is diversified in her classes for a reason. “My biggest goal for my business is really getting people to enjoy their dogs,” she says. “My slogan is, ‘Unleash the best friend you’ll ever have.’”

She believes that if you uncover your dog’s passion, you can enjoy them much more. Each dog—and dog breed—is different. They all have unique personalities, habits and desires that drive them. Learning those and using them to motivate a dog



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1. Haru flies through the air in a demonstration.
2. Nox and Apollo advertise for Triple H Dog Training as they participate in a Mineola parade.
3. Triple H Dog Training's name was inspired by the dog pack Abby had in college, which included her Yorkie, Happy, and her oldest dogs, Hime and Haru.

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makes for a happier pet and owner. “There are so many options out there, even for people and dogs that have agility issues,” she says.

One of McMillin’s students, Tammie Blanchard of Mineola, gives Triple H glowing marks. Blanchard had recently lost her 14-year-old Yorkie when she saw some German shepherd-Labrador mix puppies, and before she knew it, one of them picked her as a parent. She’d not had a large dog in many years, and her dog Molly Mae is very anxious. She looked online for help and found the Triple H website. Once she read that McMillin had owned a Yorkie as well as big dogs, she made an appointment for an evaluation.

“I needed some help to teach Molly some manners and to help her get over her anxiety,” says Blanchard. “Abby has the patience of Job—with me and with Molly. She is giving my family hope that all is going to be good.” She praised McMillin’s training style, saying, “I like that Abby’s approach is not punishment-related but rewards. Since working with Abby, we have seen a great improvement in Molly, and she has become a much more enjoyable family member!”

McMillin can be found most weekends practicing what she preaches at dog shows or competitions, as a participant with one of her pets or as an evaluator or there to help a student. She also puts on exhibitions at area businesses and performs with the Canine Stars, a stunt dog group that has performed on *America’s Got Talent*. Through her business, McMillin is likely making inroads to reduce overcrowding in shelters by reducing some of the undesirable conduct that often precedes surrender of dogs by their owners.

Helping people enjoy their dogs more—and dogs to enjoy their lives more—is what Triple H is all about. If you’re interested in McMillin’s help, the first step is an in-person evaluation for new clients. That assessment will help her establish reasonable goals based on the client and the pet. She invites canine owners who are hoping to change their dog’s behaviors or unleash hidden talents or who are interested in taking up a sport or activity to give her a call. ■