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## Valley Life



TODAY'S OUTLOOK

Mostly clear. High near 60. Lows in upper 20s to mid 30s. Northwest winds 15 to 25 mph.

WEATHER: C9 LOTTO: B



## Holiday hound hints

By LIANE M. ROTH Valley Life Associate Editor

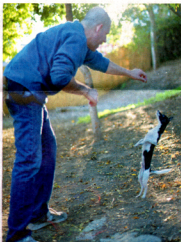
These days, many pet lovers consider their fuzzy companions to be members of the family.

Now that the holiday season finally here, what to do with a prized pooch amidst the hustle and bustle can be a perplexing problem.

Some advance planning and helpful tips from expert dog trainer Steve Brooks, everyone can relax and enjoy the festivities without worries about the family dog.

Brooks is a certified pet dog trainer through the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers. In 1999, Brooks founded Steve Brooks K9U, a dog training facility.

"I've trained thousands of dogs over the years," Brooks said. "Sometimes I eat, sleep and play dogs around the clock."



Steve Brooks and Leroy

Brooks has been featured on several television shows including "World's Funniest Pets" on WTBS and programs on Animal Planet and National Geographic Channel.

Last summer Brooks worked with Travis Brewster and his boxer, Presley, who took home the top prize at last summer's CBS reality show, "America's Greatest Dog."

The holidays are a stressful time for everyone, particularly during these tough economic conditions.

Brooks recommended developing strategies ahead of time to ease potential difficulties with a dog.

If you are hosting a get-together for an afternoon or evening event, Brooks suggests putting away dog toys, bones, beds, food dishes and water bowls before guests arrive. This keeps a possessive hound from protecting his or her property from unfamiliar guests who could be perceived as threatening a dog's food source.

"Or you can leave toys and bones in different locations around the house to give the dog something to occupy him while you're entertaining guests," Brooks said.

The moment guests arrive can be a tricky time for dogs with the stimulation and noise of greetings and introductions, he said.

"People talk in high-pitched voices loudly and that can cause a dog to react negatively," Brooks said.

He recommended giving the dog a stuffed training toy or a low-value reward such as a handful of dry kibble, something to distract the dog when the doorbell rings or guests walk through the door.

Some dogs urinate when they are overly excited or when meeting new people, he said.

"Get the dog out of the stressful situation," Brooks said.

Management options include using a leash, a non-slip soft collar or a band helper.

If necessary, prepare a separate, secure place where a dog can be kept until everyone has calmed down.

"Baby gates are great for keeping dogs contained and out of the way," he said.

A puppy-proofed yard or dog run can be used to contain a dog but if you want to have your pet be part of the festivities, time should be limited to keep him or her from getting agitated or even bored.

"Some dogs have separation problems," Brooks said.

This means the pooch has a tough time being alone while humans are interacting and having a good time without their beloved pet.

Some people want to keep their dog in the same room while serving a holiday meal.

Brooks cautioned against allowing dogs to "hang out under the table."

"If your dog has been trained and understands the concept of sit down and stay, your dog should be settled at the far end of the room, well away from the table," Brooks said. "If they stay there, you can bring them a treat to reward them for behaving correctly during the meal."

However, Brooks said, that treat should not be leftovers or scraps from the table.

It is important to remember that no matter how much a pet may seem to be part of the family or exhibit humanistic behavior, a dog is still an animal and will often revert to natural instincts during stressful times.

"Some dogs get territorial over bits of things like their food or beds and their toys and bones," Brooks said.