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Northbrook company trains dogs for owner protection –

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Many people on the North Shore seek personal and home safety through a home security system. But Elly and Carlos Aguirre are promoting protection in a very different way: through a well-trained dog.

The two are the owners of Northbrook-based dog training company Wolf's Lair K9, which offers behavior modification and obedience training, with a specialty in owner protection.

"In today's society, a protection dog can be like having an alarm in your house or mace in your hand in a parking lot," said Elly Aguirre, who with her husband, Carlos, started Wolf's Lair three years ago. "Let's say you're putting your groceries in your car and you don't notice someone coming up behind you. By being on alert, the dog is there to let you know, to deter the threat and to cause them to walk away."

The Aguirres, who met several years ago at a dog training club, explained there are several studies proving a well-trained dog will help deter or drive away an intruder or perpetrator.

Carlos, an Iraq War veteran who holds a master's degree in dog training, said protecting its owner is instinctively built into certain breeds, such as shepherds, but that any dog can essentially be trained to bring that out.

"Building a bond between the owner and the dog helps the dog be on alert and sense something the owner might not be aware of," he said. "We're not looking to train a killer dog, but rather to offer another set of eyes and assess a potentially dangerous situation."

Protection dog training begins at the owner's home, with the purpose of building up the animal's confidence and teaching it to focus.

"It's almost like a game," said Elly, who has been a volunteer for over a decade at Midwest Rescue of Illinois and Chicagoland Bully Breed Rescue. "As the dog progresses in the training and matures mentally, we start testing it in different environments and scenarios."

Alissa Elliel is a single woman living in Glenview, and a client of Wolf's Lair K9. She hired the couple last year to train her 80-pound German shepherd, who was 2 years old at the time.

"He always had a protection instinct, but I wanted to make that stronger and give him more confidence," said Elliel, an esthetician by trade and student of Krav Maga, a self-defense practice she said has caused her to be more aware of the benefits of arming oneself with such training and knowledge. "I see big differences in him since he's been trained. He's more alert and on guard. I can see him looking out for me."

Wolf's Lair K9, which Elly estimates has trained 100 dogs since its inception, also works with dog owners to help with obsessive barking, jumping on people, separation anxiety, chewing and other destructive behavior, potty training, biting and leash aggression.

"This is not really about dog training. It's about training the owner," Carlos said. "That is 90 percent of it. People think a dog thinks like a human, and the bottom line is that they don't. We have to learn to understand how the dog is thinking."

Carlos' love of dogs began during his service in the Middle East, where he worked with them to find weapons and bombs. He also said the animals helped him deal with post-traumatic stress.

"Even if you are depressed or feeling sorry for yourself, they still need to eat and go out," he said. "They can't take care of themselves. You have to do it for them."

To learn more about Wolf's Lair K9, visit WolfsLairK9.com or call 847-691-7088.

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