

www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-dogfighting_23mar23,0,6488242.story

chicagotribune.com

Program turns notorious dogs into good citizens

Pit bull owners steered away from dogfighting

By Gerry Smith

Tribune reporter

10:22 PM CDT, March 22, 2008

On the streets of [Chicago's](#) Austin neighborhood, Sean Moore and his 8-month-old pit bull, Jigga, are setting an example.

"The pit bulls you normally see, they're pulling, they're not listening, they're wild, they're barking at people," said Moore, 38. "When [other owners] see us with the same dogs, they ask, 'How do y'all do that? And how much does it cost?'"

Moore and Jigga recently completed a free pit bull training course run by the Chicago Canine Academy. The pilot program, aimed at training the dogs to be more civilized, culminated Saturday with the graduation of four pit bulls who received "good citizenship" honors from the American Kennel Club.

The course was not just for the dogs. It also focused on changing owners' attitudes in a neighborhood where pit bulls are seen as a symbol of power.

"Everybody wants to be tough. It's a macho thing," said Moore, who, like the other dog-owners, was recruited for the class by Tio Hardiman, an anti-dog-fighting advocate.

During the eight weeks of training, Jim Morgan sought to dispel the notion that pit bulls are only good for fighting. Morgan, who owns the academy, at 4934 W. Belmont Ave., noticed that the owners were beginning to see their dogs in a new light.

"These guys are developing an empathy for these dogs they've never had before," he said.

At a graduation ceremony Saturday, the dogs received Canine Good Citizen awards, a distinction that eventually can allow the dogs to be trained to aid people in therapy.

Most people should not own pit bulls, particularly without training, Morgan said. The breed has a naturally high level of aggression, which owners sometimes exploit for the purposes of dogfighting, he said.



But by developing a bond between pit bull and owner, Morgan said, he hopes graduates will think twice before subjecting dogs to violence.

"When the dog does something for you, and you praise him, that dog is so happy," Morgan said. "When you see that joy, how can you put that dog in a ring and let it get torn up?"

gsmith@tribune.com

Copyright © 2008, [Chicago Tribune](#)