

# ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

info@arkandtent.com

- Home
- Articles Index
- Travel Articles
- World Beat
- Helping Hands
- Pet Projects
- Field Notes
- Trips & Tours
- Reader's Corner
- Newsletter
- About Us

## BOWSER BOOTCAMP

*Doggie Fitness Programs Provide Tail-Waggin' Fun*

By Katey Pfeil



Sprinting down the Southern California coastline with my darling five-year old pit bull Carmen (who despite the negative associations with her breed, is 100% lady and completely incapable of harming a fly), we raced alongside thirteen other dogs and their owners.

In a chaotically-controlled-kind-of-way, Carmen's strong, compact body dragged

my less athletic frame towards an invisible finish line. As the flamingo pink sky let loose a gentle burst of raindrops, I made a decision right then and there to relax and just enjoy the Leash Your Fitness bootcamp I'd signed Carmen and myself up for regardless of the fact that: a) my hair might become frizzier than the chow's to my left, and - more importantly - b) I might not be able to make it through the entire class.

Programs like the one I attended, hosted by Dawn Celapino (creator and director of the San Diego-based company Leash Your Fitness), are popping up throughout the country and aim to provide workouts and bootcamps tailored to provide health benefits to owners, as well as their canine friends while simultaneously incorporating dog obedience and socializing time into each meeting.

Leash Your Fitness began a few years back when Celapino (who has been a personal trainer for 18 years) felt guilty for leaving her dog Jack (a Cairn terrier) at home every time she went to the gym. In 2005, Celapino introduced her new brand of exercise to the public, incorporating balls, bands, hand weights, playground equipment, benches and nature to form a fitness regimen suitable for both owner and dog. LYF classes are offered throughout San Diego County, and are attended by a wide range of participants, most of whom are women. Conveniently, owners and dogs of all fitness levels are invited to attend LYF walking classes, boo camps,



yoga, or trail groups for \$12-\$17.50 per class.

“The success of our groups lies partly in the fact that people want new activities to do with their dogs besides just taking them on walks or throwing a ball,” says the perennially-energetic Celapino. “In our classes, dogs have to ‘think’ while they are exercising and that offers mental stimulation that will not only make them a better-behaved dog, but also a tired dog!” Currently, the LYF program boasts an average count of thirty regular members, although not all of them attend at the same time.

On the day Carmen and I participated in the unexpectedly challenging (although completely self-paced) bootcamp in Mission Bay, we were met by an affable mix of other dogs and their owners who were more than happy to share their turf with us newcomers. An elegant greyhound, Welsh corgi, shepherd, and a Chihuahua-mix were among the dogs in attendance. They received obedience lessons, while their owners were required to do squats, lunges, and arm exercises. Although a few sharp barks and skeptical sniffs marked the beginning of class, by the end of the hour it seemed all the dogs were comfortable and happy with their fellow exercising companions.

When asked why she enjoys the LYF program, Robbyn Echon (a friendly participant in her early 30’s who’s been involved with the group for about two months) replied, “This program is unique. It gives my boxer Austin and I the chance to get out and enjoy the outdoors together while engaging in a fun workout. There’s really nothing else like this around.” Another first-timer named Scottish Sue thought she and her small poodle, Maggie May (named after the Rod Stewart song), liked the program well enough to return. “I just think Maggie wishes I could run a bit faster,” Sue admitted.

Although LYF was one of the first canine friendly fitness groups, it certainly isn’t the



only one. From east to west, similar programs are taking off. ThankDog! Bootcamp offers classes in the Los Angeles County area, and will even come to your home for one-on-one workouts with you and your pooch. For those located near Raleigh, Four Paws Fitness offers a convenient Monday-Friday schedule and offers seniors (65 and up) a 10% discount. However, if you’re looking for something a little more “zen-like,”

Brenda Bryan’s classes located in Seattle, at her West Side Yoga Doga Studio takes the cake.

Bryan calls her unique style of yoga “Barking Buddha Doga.” Her classes have been in business for almost five years and integrate dogs into classes while offering them a great way to connect in a deeper way with their owners. Surprisingly, Bryan tells me that dogs of all breeds and sizes are welcome. “I regularly have dogs over a hundred pounds attending classes as well as Chihuahuas, German shepherds, mixed breeds, whatever. I love the variety of our classes. Their healing nature is our common thread.”

She goes on to assure me that all sorts of dogs are capable of being “dogis,” as she likes to call them. “Doga is an organic practice. We *are* working with dogs after all, and if they bark or whine, that’s not such a big deal. The biggest concern potential students have is whether or not their dog is ‘chill’ enough to participate. I always

remind students to chill out about their dogs chilling out.”

Dogs enrolled in Bryan’s yoga classes benefit from the love and attention they receive from their owners during class, and also from the massage, stretching, and social time before and after class.

Furthermore, people of all skill levels are welcome to attend as Bryan says she has had a seasoned ashtanga yogi in his 30’s practicing next to a first timer in her 60’s. Classes cost \$15 a session.



If you’re interested in checking out a fitness program near you, or would like to try one while you and your pooch are on "on the road," take a hint from Brenda Bryan and give it a try anyway: “Recently, one of my regular ‘dogis’ (he’s been attending class since he was just a puppy) walked right up to my mat just before I was about to begin class and pooped on it. That’s right, he pooped on my mat. This particular class was full and had at least a few people interested in signing up for the teacher training seminar, so I said to the class as I cleaned up the poop, ‘There you have it: this teaches us to go with the flow in doga and in life, because sometimes, s\*\*t happens!’

“Fortunately,” she continues in a good-natured manner, “I got a few laughs. Everyone relaxed after that, because other than a dog fight, what else could happen that would horrify a dog owner more than their dog pooping in class?”

#### **FAST FACTS**

##### ***Leash Your Fitness***

619-822-3296

[www.leashyourfitness.com](http://www.leashyourfitness.com)

##### ***West Side Yoga Doga***

Brenda Bryan

206-501-4474

[www.brendabryan.net](http://www.brendabryan.net)

[www.westsidexogadoga.com](http://www.westsidexogadoga.com)

##### ***ThankDog!Bootcamp***

818-364-4256

[www.thankdogbootcamp.com](http://www.thankdogbootcamp.com)

##### ***Four Paws Fitness***

919-758-8210

[www.trainingyourbestfriend.com](http://www.trainingyourbestfriend.com)

Photo credits: Dawn Celapino; Bev Sparks; Luna Aquila

Posted August/September 2010



Site Map