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photo by [Tracy Agnew](#)

Obedience class: Karen Holderman teaches her dog, Smiley, to lie down at an obedience class sponsored by Suffolk Humane Society.

Class graduates nine good dogs

By [Tracy Agnew \(Contact\)](#) | Suffolk News-Herald

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The last night of obedience classes sponsored by Suffolk Humane Society brought nine dogs and their owners out to practice their tricks one more time and to receive graduation diplomas.

“I have definitely seen an improvement,” said Pam Tidwell, whose dog Holly barked excessively and never obeyed before coming to the class. Not only does Holly rarely bark now, but also “she’s learned to sit and stay,” Tidwell said.

The instructors of the class agreed.

“I think they’ve done marvelous,” said Paula Dayton, one of three instructors for the class. “The ones that stayed through it have really improved.”

The instructors — Dayton, Vanessa Vance and Lisa Branton — are members of the Merrimac Dog Training Club in Hampton, and volunteered their time for the classes so that all proceeds could go toward the Suffolk Humane Society. The classes netted about \$1,000 for the society, minus money for supplies and a donation to the Magnolia Ruritan Club, in whose building the classes were held.

“It’s remarkable the difference that we see,” Dayton said.

About 26 dogs were signed up for the four-week course, but several dropped out after their owners realized they were expected to train their dogs themselves, Dayton said.

“We actually train people to train their dogs,” Dayton said. “Some people think we train their dogs for them.”

Mike and Karen Holderman brought their dogs Lucky and Smiley to the classes. Both were rescued from the outdoors last year — Smiley from a pack of feral dogs in rural North Carolina, and Lucky from the middle of Route 460.

“He has been very good,” Mike Holderman said of Lucky. “It’s amazing. He does all the sits and spins.”

Smiley’s mouth had been injured as a puppy, and she was starving when the Holdermans found her, because she could not fend for food among the rest of the pack, Karen Holderman said. However, the dog’s mouth is now healing, and she is learning to live with humans.

“This definitely helped her get herself under control and bond with us more,” Karen Holderman said.

At the end of Monday’s class — which included practice walking, sitting, standing, staying, doing tricks and the most important skill of all, coming when called — each dog and owner received a graduation certificate from Suffolk Humane Society executive director Heidi Giroux.

“These volunteers have been wonderful,” Tidwell said. “For them to volunteer their time, I think that’s wonderful.”

The classes were so successful that the humane society plans to do another round of classes in the spring, Dayton said.