



# ZOOM ROOM

## With Jaime Van Wye

By Denis Fleck

A graduate of U.C. Berkeley with a degree in Philosophy, Jamie Van Wye followed her heart to work with dogs and created the Zoom Room after hoping to send training clients to local agility classes she soon realized did not exist. Frustrated by long drives and outdoor puddles, she developed Los Angeles' first indoor dog agility training center providing a much-needed social and exercise outlet for the urban pooch and owner. Jaime is a Certified Master Dog Trainer, a graduate of the North State K9 Academy and a Professional Level Member of the International Association of Canine Professionals. She has trained dogs in search and rescue, bomb and drug detection, criminal apprehension and tracking, and is the author of the satirical self-help book, *How to Have an Ill-Behaved Dog*.

**Denise Fleck: How did a degree in Philosophy send you on a path to training canines?**

Jaime Van Wye: Philosophy taught me to think critically. I feel it's a deficit in a lot of dog trainers in that they tend to learn by hacking around and seeing what works and what doesn't. A key component of what we do at the Zoom Room is education. A serious background in dog training and an understanding of dog psychology — how dogs learn — is vital to good training. I also stress communication as it is important to make sure owners understand since we don't go home nightly with their dogs.

**DF: Where did you obtain your training and how are your franchisees trained?**

JVW: I studied with Jerry Bradshaw at the Tarheel Canine

Training Academy in North Carolina doing Police Dog work, but I do a lot of research and continue my education by attending conferences not to mention tons of reading. One of my favorite places to learn is [www.itunesu.com](http://www.itunesu.com) where you can download behavior and psychology lectures. I pursue this education on behalf of my franchisees as well — really putting them through the educational ringer. By the time they meet with me for one-on-one training, they have read very serious text books. I then require them to obtain hands-on experience in their community by volunteering 100 hours at a local shelter. Besides giving back and making them part of the community, this exposes them to a variety of dog types. Within 6 months, they are ready to sit for the Canine Certification Council of Pet Dog Trainers.

**DF: The Zoom Room is billed as an Agility, Training and Social Club. Explain the variety of things that happen here?**

JVW: The primary focus is on positive interaction with your dog — to enhance YOUR life with YOUR dog. We cater to the basic pet owner who is not aware their dog has the ability to do what competitive dogs do and are always surprised at what their pooch has in him! Agility is such a great way to communicate with your dog, particularly if you are having behavior problems at home. It has turned people around who were giving up on their dogs. Our Calm Down! class incorporates obedience with desensitization. High arousal dogs tend to have prey issues, so we teach them to lie with their head on the ground while various activities happen around them. Shy Dog is for timid

Photo courtesy of Zoom Room Hollywood



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rescues or dogs who weren't socialized during that critical 6 weeks and younger period. They meet new people and get a cookie! Everything is a game. We introduce them to "guest" teenage boys who can appear overwhelming, remote control helicopters, get out scary costumes, bicycles, wheelchairs and more to prepare dogs for any situation in life. Zoom Room is all about offering a wide range of classes that everyone can participate in including doggie disco parties, movie night and other special events.

**DF: Do you offer anything for the young and the not-so-young dog?**

JVW: Puppy Preschool develops socialization and we add in obedience and beginning agility which is so beneficial for large puppies who have no idea where their rear end is. For the older set, Senior Stretch & Agility provides a low impact workout to keep older dogs moving and their minds stimulated while spending quality time with their human. Puzzles that offer treats, squeakers and hide and seek games are excellent for mental acuity.

**DF: You mentioned you teach Seventy-eight behaviors? Please explain...**

JVW: How to ride a skate board, pick up laundry (which can be beneficial to physically challenged owners) and training to be a therapy dog are some of the things your dog can learn. For canines (or owners) with stars in their eyes, we teach them to

go "mark left and right." We have a curriculum for herding dogs, now including treibball, and K9 Nosework is super fun no matter your pup's age. For those dogs who like to "sit one out," the Zoom Room offers a program where kids read out loud to our certified therapy dogs, so we do our best to make it as easy as possible for people and dogs to interact and enjoy each others' company.

**DF: With all these great things to do, does Clyde participate?**

JVW: Clyde is his own man. He's a great dog but has a short attention span. I'm delighted if we get in 90-120 seconds a day of good work. Know your dog and tailor your program accordingly.

**DF: Who comes to the Zoom Room?**

JVW: People who want to have a good time with their dog. Doggie Day Cares serve a purpose but there is no interaction with your dog and you as you are entrusting your pet's care to someone else when you can't be there. The Zoom Room is about playing with your dog in a way that enriches both your lives. Dogs with high energy need exercise and depending on your part of the country, the weather might not cooperate for extended time outdoors.

**DF: Can any dog be an agility dog?**

JVW: A huge stable of English Bulldogs come here



and rock it out. They probably couldn't perform in the Southern California outdoors but have a great time inside our air conditioned facility. We have Chihuahuas, Great Danes, blind dogs, partially sighted dogs, deaf dogs – it's definitely an equal opportunity agility place and dogs of all sizes and skill can find something that is right for them.

**DF: What are your proudest moments?**

JVW: One lady told me her Havanese was brain damaged because she could not learn anything. Turns out, clicker training was the key because her mind was going too fast for his owner to appropriately mark the behavior. Within 60 minutes I got her to enjoy her dog. Dogs that aren't motivated by treats due to anxiety or disinterest can be difficult. With another dog I discovered he LOVES ice chips. Another trainer may have gotten frustrated and resorted to punishment but we study the dog and try to fill his needs.

**DF: How do you become a Zoom Room Member?**

JVW: If your dog has never been to a group class or involved in professional training, we start you in an intro agility class to see where dog and handler are at, taking note if your dog needs more obedience, is okay around other dogs, is easily aroused or showing signs of prey drift. The first 6 weeks is on-leash learning all the obstacles. The goal is for dogs

to focus on the obstacle, treat and owner — not other dogs. That way we are able to develop off-leash reliability for the next stage.

**DF: Is agility for competition or just plain fun?**

JVW: One Samoyed at our Hollywood facility has won breed competition and special. One partially sighted dog is competing at novice level. We introduce agility to people who might never have been able to make it fit into their lifestyle but mostly, we offer a place where dogs and their people can spend quality time together in a safe and temperate environment.

**DF: What's next?**

JVW: More franchises. Right now we have 11 with Zoom Room coming to Charlotte, Milwaukee, Denver and Claremont, CA. I would certainly like to see us in markets like Chicago and NY that could benefit from an indoor facility due to their inclement weather. **DS**

*Denise Fleck is the author of Quickfind Books Pet Care series and an animal care instructor specializing in Pet First-Aid and CPR. She is the President of the Volunteers of the Burbank Animal Shelter, a member of the Surf City Animal Response Team and appears regularly on TV sharing Pet Safety Tips. She is owned by two rescued Akitas...Haiku & Bonsai. Visit her website at [www.sunnydogink.com](http://www.sunnydogink.com).*

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