

DCMA Employee's True Passion to Train Shelties

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By day, Becky Grant is an information technology specialist in charge of software acquisition policy at Defense Contract Management Agency headquarters. Grant is working to set up the DCMA Software Center, and her department is responsible for policy, instructions, guidance, training and tools associated with software management. But after hours, Grant embraces her true passion: she is an agility instructor and trains and competes with her Shetland Sheepdogs or, as they are commonly known, "Shelties."



 Becky Grant's Sheltie, Willie, exiting a tunnel on an agility course. (Photos courtesy of Becky Grant, DCMA Headquarters)

During the competitions, the judges measure the length of the course and how long it should take the dog to complete it without any mistakes. The dogs follow their trainer's voice commands

and shoulder, head, eye and foot movements for cues as to how they should navigate the course.

According to Grant, it takes approximately two years of training before the dogs are ready to begin competing. The hardest agility skill for the dogs to learn is navigating the "weave poles" because it isn't a movement pattern dogs perform in nature. Weave pole training involves rows of thin poles placed at 22-inch intervals through which a dog must "weave" its body to get to the other side. Successful training can be accomplished in as little as four or five minutes a

Grant has four Shelties: TJ, the oldest, who is retired from agility competitions; Willie, who got Grant started teaching dogs agility and entering them in competitions; Bunni; and Nikki, the youngest, who will begin training this summer.

 Becky Grant and her Sheltie, Bunni, on an agility course.



day over a period of several months. Grant and her dogs began attending classes seven years ago. When she and her husband got Willie, he was a very active puppy and they realized he needed more than just playing in the yard; he needed a job. “For that matter, we needed a hobby that wasn’t just sitting in front of the computer or the television — we wanted to become more active,” Grant said. Her breeder suggested agility training, and, after taking the first class with Willie, they were hooked and continued training with all of their dogs.

For the first year and a half, Grant watched from the sidelines while her husband worked with the dogs because she had been injured in an accident and didn’t think she could participate. Inspired by a woman who had muscular dystrophy and was showing dogs while on crutches, Grant decided to give it a try and compete using the United Kennel Club’s provisions for handicapped trainers. “With some lifestyle changes and the recovery from the accident, I was able to do it, and we now compete in several venues in addition to UKC.”

“We are continuing to progress in proficiency in the agility trials,” Grant said. “My goals are not the same as those of the competitors you see on “Animal Planet.” My first goal was to see if I could do it; my second goal was to see if I

Becky Grant’s Sheltie, Willie, competing in the a novice-level weave poll agility course.



could make course time, because I hated to have handicapped times to qualify.” Now Grant says her goal is to continue to improve her performance with Bunni and introduce Nikki to agility.

What Grant enjoys most about competing is not winning but meeting people, working with her dogs and witnessing a dog’s excitement when it knows it’s going to a competition. “Outside of work, this satisfies me on so many levels — it gives me friendship, it gives me companionship with my dogs, it gives me physical challenges,”

Grant said. “People who enjoy their dogs would be amazed at just how much fun this is.”



Becky Grant’s Sheltie, TJ, prior to his retirement, jumping over an obstacle on an agility course.