



# The best dog for working families? Coton de Tulear's have plenty of upside

By Gerry Baksys

Look out your window. It's probably cold, possibly wet with freezing rain or snow and the dog needs to be taken for a walk. Grumbling, you pull on your coat and shoes and prepare to leave the comfort of your home to brave the elements. If only there was a better way, you think.

Perhaps there is. Brian and Kelly Oelke, of Hickman, recently welcomed home a dog that eliminates the bad weather problem.

Their Coton de Tulear, a small fluffy white bundle of energy named Belle, is litter-trained.

You read correctly; Belle has her own litter box in the Oelke' laundry room. It essentially functions the same way as a cat's litter box, with a few minor differences.

"It's bigger than a general cat litter box," Oelke said. "And it has bigger litter in it. They are bigger pellets. When you clean the litter box, you just flush the voidings

down the toilet." Oelke said Belle was trained to use the litter box, but can also do her business like normal dogs outside.

"Once they smell their voidings in the litter box," Oelke said, "they know that is where they're supposed to go."

While it can be hard to find, Oelke said dog litter can be located at major pet stores.

"Whenever I go in and take the last bag off the shelf," Oelke said, "I always remind them to order more."

Picking the perfect dog.

Kelly and Brian have four children: Holden, 17, Tanner, 15, Jack, 10, and Sam, 2. As a family, Belle is their first dog; so they wanted to make sure to get the perfect breed.

"We did online compatibility tests where they looked at the personality of the owners and the personality of dogs and tries to match them up," Kelly said. "We came up with Belle."

Coton de Tulears have several



Kelly Oelke's dream of having a fluffy white dog came true with Belle. Photo by KD

Even Jack, who wanted a tougher-looking dog at first, has come around.

"I wanted a boxer," Jack said, "but I love Belle now."

**The Oelke family got Belle from Heartland Classics, a breeder in Lyons. According to the Heartland Classic website:**

"(Coton de Tulear's) are believed to have originated on the island of Madagascar more than three centuries ago. They are members of the Bichon family (Bichon Frise, Havanese, Lowchen, Bolognese, and Maltese) and believed to have mixed with the island's terriers and Papillons. Cotons are born with either pink or black skin. They come in two base colors with those being either black or white. Accents include white, tri color, yellow or grey. Although their coats tend to turn lighter in color as they age, pigmentation in a puppy with color is superior to one born white."



Belle is litter-trained. Her litter box is bigger than a typical cat litter-box and the litter itself is different.

easily be trained to do a variety of tricks; although Kelly said they haven't started training Belle yet.

"She may be a little too smart," Kelly said. "We used to have a baby gate in front of the laundry room to keep her in, but she would jump over that. Then we put up two gates, but she would jump and push the top one off, and then jump over the bottom one."

So Brian installed an old half door that is too high to jump over and locks so she can't push it open.

Perfect family dog Besides being smart and trainable, Kelly said Belle's also great with kids.

"She likes to rough house with the kids," Kelly said, "and she doesn't bite. She also listens well."

And the timing was great. Kelly said before, her family was too busy to take care of a pet. But now that her children are older, everyone can pitch in to help.

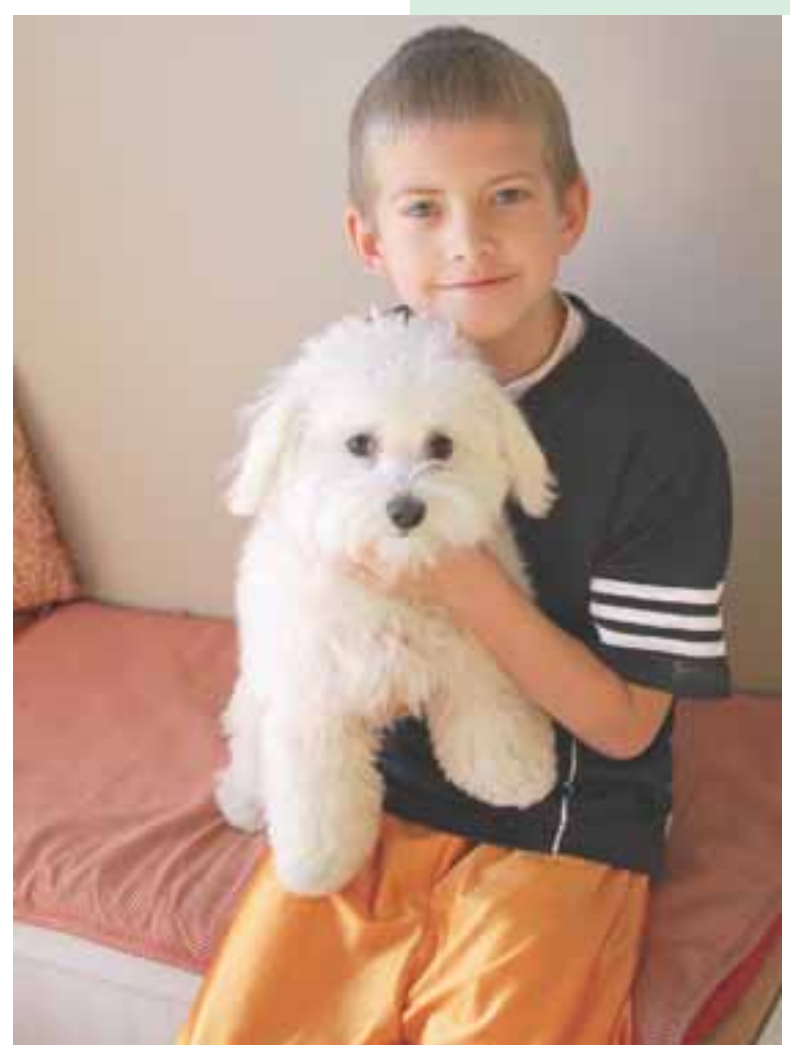
Indeed, Belle has grown on everyone in the family, even though her breed wasn't the first choice for some.

"My husband and sons were looking for bigger dogs," Kelly said. "But my husband surprised me with her as an anniversary gift. I have wanted a fluffy white dog forever."

attributes that the Oelke family loved. They are a small dog ("The perpetual puppy," Kelly said), with a max weight of 8-10 pounds. They have super soft white fur that is hypo-allergenic and does not shed. They are also a smart and can

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Jake, 10, said he originally wanted a boxer, but has come to love the fluffy Belle. Gerry Baksys/VOICE NEWS

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# Pamper your pets



A VOICE NEWS Special Section

## The top five healthy habits for pets and owners

(NewsUSA) - Pets are the lights of their owners' lives. And keeping pets healthy is key to extending the warmth and love for years. Dr. Ernie Ward, nationally renowned veterinarian, pet author, and founder of the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention, offers his 'Top 5 Healthy Habits' for pet owners to help ensure pets stay happy and healthy throughout the year:

**1. Healthy Eats and Treats.** The most important decision you make each day regarding your pet's health is what you feed it. When choosing pet food, look for meat as one of the first few ingredients, and avoid by-products, artificial flavors, colors, and preservatives whenever possible.

When it comes to treats, look for low-cal options that confer some health benefit. Treats that help maintain healthy joints, clean teeth, or ensure pills are taken are recommended. The Greenies Brand specializes in great-tasting treats individually formulated to deliver these benefits. If you're going to give treats, make them count!

**2. Brain Boosters.** Most people love puzzles -- and so does your pet! One of the best ways to feed and treat pets is with a food puzzle. These clever devices hide your pet's food or treats until they unlock the secret and get their

goodies. These tools engage your pet's brain and bust boredom while you're away. Forget peanut butter-stuffed toys; these toys stimulate thought and don't pack on the pounds!

**3. Power Play.** Walking your dog and playing with your cat each day keeps them trim, healthy and mentally alert. Pets that don't receive enough physical activity ("lap potatoes") have the highest rates of weight-related diseases such as arthritis and diabetes and suffer from behavioral problems. For dogs, 20 to 30 minutes of brisk walking each day benefits both ends of the leash. For cats, two or three five-minute play periods are plenty. And don't worry! Walking with your pet can be fun! Try programs like Greenies Wag & Walk 4 Life, and get active with your pet.

**4. Paws Together.** It's more fun to play with other dogs! Socialized dogs are simply better behaved and more fun. Visit a dog park, enroll in training classes or become active in serving your community. There are endless ways to get you and your dog to interact with other pet lovers. Share the fun and join a new pack!

**5. Pets and Vets.** Somehow pet owners started believing that the only time you need a vet is when



something is wrong with your pet. The secret to a long and healthy life is vet visits when everything appears fine. A pet owner's primary goal should be to prevent disease, not only treat it. Changes in diet or

lifestyle, giving nutritional supplements and exercising more are straight forward solutions. Sometimes you just need a prod; other times a push. Your veterinarian is your pet's voice; let them speak for

your pet by visiting once a year for young pets and twice yearly for those over age seven.

For more best-care tips for pets, visit [www.greenies.com](http://www.greenies.com) and [www.drenniward.com](http://www.drenniward.com).

### Tips on how to get ready for a new pet

Whether you're thinking of adopting a pet now or in the future, it's never too early to prepare for your future family member. To ensure a smooth transition, it's helpful to plan for the arrival of your new pet by putting together a shopping list, reorganizing your schedule to make time for your pet, and even participating in activities that allow your family to interact with animals now.

• Try a virtual pet. "The Sims 3 Pets," the newest offering from one of the world's most popular videogame franchises, will give your family the chance to care for and even be-a virtual pet with personality traits and moods just like a real pet. Playing the game both entertains and sheds light on the responsibilities of caring for a pet,

including scheduled feedings, playtime, training, and even dealing with your pet's unruly side. You can also take on the role of a pet to gain a new perspective and see the world through an animal's eyes. The Sims 3 Pets, available now for Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Nintendo 3DS, PC, and Mac, will virtually help you prepare for your new family member.

• Sponsor an animal-A great activity for the family is an adopt-an-animal package from a local zoo. By donating and registering for the adoption, you can foster a great relationship with animals while helping to support them at the zoo. The donation is even tax deductible. Another great option to engage your family with animals is to donate to a non-profit organization such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and

help endangered species by adopting or sponsoring a particular animal with your family.

• Volunteer at a local shelter-A rewarding way to gauge your ability to care for a pet is to volunteer at a local animal shelter or rescue organization. Not only will you spend time with animals that need care and attention, but you and your family will also have the opportunity to bond directly with animals. It can prepare you for life with a pet or help determine if you are ready for the responsibilities of becoming a pet owner.

Preparing for your pet is incredibly important so that you can enjoy a happy and healthy life with your pet. For more information on The Sims 3 Pets videogame, visit <http://www.thesims3.com>.

### Caring for pets of the homeless

by Eleanor Gilman/ AARP

Why would a homeless person have a pet when he can barely take care of himself? That's what Genevieve Frederick of Carson City, Nevada, wondered when she saw a homeless man begging, his dog next to him. Then she realized that the pet was probably his only companion.

Frederick soon learned that the man's situation wasn't unique. Of the nation's 3.5 million homeless people, 10 percent have at least one pet.

Frederick, 64, founded Pets of the Homeless, which provides food and veterinary care for pets of homeless people throughout the United States and parts of Canada. Starting with one food collection site in 2007, the orga-

nization has expanded to meet an increased need caused by job losses, depleted retirement income and foreclosures. It now has 288 collection sites and 256 distribution sites.

"Pets of the homeless don't choose their owners," says Frederick. "But that doesn't matter, as long as they receive attention and love."

I love a dog. He does nothing for political reasons. -Will Rogers



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