

## Man's best friend: The new social scene



Can owning a dog improve your confidence? You might be surprised.

"Dogs are great icebreakers in social situations," says Lorelei Zwitter, behaviorist, certified personal trainer, registered veterinary technician and owner of My Dog & Me.

"Dogs can take stress out of social situations by providing an adorable distraction, so people are more inclined to strike up a conversation." Think about it, how many total strangers have you met by simply asking, "Hey, what kind of dog is that?"

"We have an eclectic group of people that show up for our informal Run with the Pack outings on Friday nights," Zwitter says. "The group is made up of young, old, married, single, gay and straight individuals of all races. It's dog ownership that brings these people together."

Does a dog turn you into a date magnet? Who knows, but at least you can shed some shyness.

— Sandra Cook

*My Dog & Me, 2215 Lawrence in the Heights, (713) 864-3436.*

## Communication that counts

From three-word emails to 20-second cell phone calls, modern means of communication can leave us feeling short on personal connection. Think back to the last time you sent or received a personal letter. Consider trying it again.

Reviving this old-fashioned form of correspondence may deliver unexpected – and positive – results. "Selecting stationery that reflects your interests and personalizing it so it's unique to you makes you feel important," says Dyanne Lyerly Jackson, stationery department manager for Bering's Hardware. "We've seen a growing interest in personal stationery. Many young people have realized they are at a point in their lives where they are ready for their own stationery."

When it's time to stop relying on mass-produced greeting cards, try some sophisticated or stylish blank note cards that will allow you to say exactly what you mean, no matter if it's a "thanks for hosting the party" note, a "great to see you again" message or a "congrats on the promotion" occasion.

After you've mastered that, take the next step: custom stationery. Choose your favorite colors or design elements from your home that friends and family will recognize. It's an opportunity to express who you are and embrace the fact that you are your own person, so be true to yourself and enjoy the benefits. "When you love what you're writing on it motivates you to keep in touch," Jackson says.

— Sandra Cook

*Bering's Hardware, 3900 Bissonnet, (713) 665-0500.*

