**HAPPY FOUR WEEK BIRTHDAY**

 This week was all about sound enrichment. Puppies at this stage do not know fear; their brains are simply like sponges. It is our job to provide curated experiences suitable for the developmental stage, which may vary from puppy to puppy in the same litter.

Enter Maestro! Ditch the hard rock or country tunes, and set your tunes to classical music. Numerous studies bear out that dogs listening to classical music spent less time standing or pacing, more readily laying down to rest (when in kennel or shelter situation) and all dogs had lower heart rates when they listened to Mozart and other greats. Puppies exposed daily to 30-45 minutes of classical music throughout their first 12 weeks have been shown to cope and/or recover from stressful episodes as adults more readily.

Puppies were also exposed to household noises. No excuse not to vacuum the house, use the garbage disposal and the like. We even had a project installing new stair risers and carpeting in the hallway adjacent to the puppies. Only the slightest head tilt or roll over while sleeping was the only reaction. We also played environmental sound playlists which had sirens, baby crying and general NOISE, first at low volume then turned up fairly loud.

With each new sounds, we only wanted a slight startle response. We watch carefully and back off, up or away if the sound is too disturbing; for example, I vacuumed in an adjacent room one day (husband observed slight head tilts in the puppies orienting toward the sound before they went on with play). The following day I vacuumed around their pen. The puppies just kept chewing on their bones, and the vacuum was more or less ignored.

Exercise is also very important for their developing bodies. Research has shown that exercise actually results in bigger brains. For this reason, we enlarged our weaning pen space and keep it clutter free to encourage motion and a good game of chase and rumble. Each day a novelty item or two is presented (cat tunnel, play box/mobile, little step stool, interactive toy, fleece tug). The toys remain only for that day; then removed. We capitalize on the attraction principle of novelty (newness).

During the first twelve weeks of life (weeks 3-12 for critical socialization), the puppies are wired to be curious and move TOWARD novelty. After that 12-week marker, puppies will be much more wary of novelty and more cautiously engage; oftentimes moving AWAY from novelty. It is part and parcel of nature’s survival modus operandi (M.O.)

With Puppy Culture, we take full advantage of this time and fully engage the puppies in what is called the “enrichment effect”. The exposure to a variety of sounds being the highlight of this week. Next week, the communication trinity will unfold.

The proof is in puppy! A puppy that is an enrichment seeker with the skill sets to negotiate having one paw in the canine world & the other paw in the human world.