**HAPPY WEEK FIVE BIRTHDAY**

No relationship can develop, or be sustained, without communication. Young, pre-verbal children who are taught sign language have been shown to have stronger social-emotional bonds with their caregivers and have cognitive gains up to a year over peers not taught sign language. We’d like our Foxhaven puppies to develop deep relationships with people and associated cognitive gains.

This week we introduced what is known as the “communication trinity” (Puppy Culture). It is essentially puppy sign language. First, the clicker (click & treat) creates a classically conditioned response and a feeling of wellbeing. Secondly, the puppies, through a variety of exercises, begin to offer behaviors to gain a reward (pet or treat). It became clear with the box game that they were engaged, happily curious and were becoming operant.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the puppies are heard by us. Dogs are social animals with emotional needs. These needs are oftentimes expressed by behaviors that do not fit in well in the human world. Jumping up for attention is but one example of a puppy dog asking for attention. The third strand of the communication trinity teaches the puppy that, yes you have a voice AND let me show you how to speak to me. Now that the puppy understands the marker for desired behavior (click or ‘good’), we begin to mark for unsolicited sits and eye contact. That is what we call “manding”. It will translate into the puppy dog sitting for attention with the presence of a human being the cue.

We will unpack this more in future diaries. However, the puppies are already beginning to neatly line up around the edge of their play pen area versus a mad swarm of barking & jumping. Each little seated bum gains praise, a pet (tactile treat) or a tiny piece of cheese or cookie. It is a work in progress.

To keep our morning Montessori Puppy lessons fresh, we intersperse some nose work games and scent challenges. It is very evident that the sense of smell is their first sense, so to speak. It is fun for me to cheer them on, in my head, as they search for their “find” or treat. I can nearly see their neurons building new pathways with each happy sniff and bingo-munch at the prize.

This was also a week of visitors, being Thanksgiving. The pups were cuddled, kissed and played with by folks of all ages. Their favorites were, of course, children and men with beards! They experienced snow with their new friends, too. They ate the snow, made it yellow (LOL) and ran around in it with great cheer.

We had a few sunny warm afternoons and we created a safe outdoor play area on our back deck. Big sister Gracie loves to pup sit and I think they look up to her. I know they think she is beautiful!

