

Milton • Means Business

Board game teaches kids how to act around dogs

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

Milton-area residents Teresa Lewin and Joan Wormald were sick and tired of hearing yet another report of a child being mauled by a dog.

They were also fed up with dog owners claiming their dogs could never bite anyone.

It was time for some public education on dog bite prevention. And who better to do the job than themselves, as dog trainers? That was their thinking a year-and-a-half ago, and today they're busy promoting their message with a unique method: a board game.

"We knew we had to find a way to get our message out to a (wide) audience and a game seemed like a good way to do this," said Ms Wormald, who helps with the training at the obedience school Teresa Lewin owns, Milton K9 Obedience, 781 Main St. She's also a scientist specializing in risk assessment.

The game — which is currently being produced and should be available next month — is called Doggone Crazy and it's already earning rave reviews and is even being shipped to the United States. It targets children aged four to 12, but Ms Lewin and Ms Wormald are quick to point out that even adults enjoy it. The goal, they said, is to teach kids how to act around dogs.

"We teach children how to recognize dangerous situations and avoid them. They have to know how to keep safe — they can't rely on their parents or the dog handler," said Ms Lewin, a canine behaviour specialist.

It's easy to misinterpret an animal's body language, they both said. For example, when a dog yawns, most people think it means the dog is tired. Not so. It actually means the dog is anxious, Ms Wormald said. Likewise, few people understand that a dog is feeling worried when it lifts a paw.

It's important to understand these actions, Ms Lewin said, because every dog has the potential to bite. "When people ask me if our dogs bite, we say they have teeth, they may use them," she said.

In Doggone Crazy, kids move their markers along the board and, depending on the colour of the square they land on, they may have to answer



a skill-testing question, collect a bone — the player with the most bones at the end wins — or pick up a 'See-See-See-It' card. These cards feature pictures of dogs displaying various types of behaviours — taken by Ms Wormald in Ms Lewin's classes, at the obedience school. From the photos, children must identify whether the dog would be safe to pet.

The game has been endorsed by the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, the Professional Animal Behaviourists and the National Association for Humane and Environmental Education, an arm of the U.S. humane society. The Canada Safety Council estimates that about 400,000 people are bitten by dogs every year in Canada. What most people

don't know, the women said, is that most victims know the dogs that bite them — often they're their own dogs.

Both Ms Lewin's and Ms Wormald's children have been instrumental in the creation of the game, they said.

For more information on how to obtain Doggone Crazy, visit www.doggonecrazy.ca. Or, for a sneak peak, you can visit the Doggone Crazy booth at the Brookville School fair June 7. The game will also be available — starting next month — at Milton K9 Obedience, Pet Value, the Animal Hospital of Milton, Hawkin's Animal Hospital and the Brookville Veterinary Clinic.

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From left, Jennifer Wormald, Joan Wormald, Anne Wormald, Teresa Lewin and William Lewin show off a prototype of their new board game, Doggone Crazy. The game — a joint venture between the two families — was spawned from the local women's ongoing concerns over dog attacks. The game will be available next month at a number of local animal centres including Milton K9 Obedience, Pet Value and the Animal Hospital of Milton.

Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

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