

Bear, meet Bico

Michael Nezbeth, founder of Grassroots K9, a Brampton-based dog training business, is proud to share the story of how one of his dogs helped save its owner from a bear.

Earlier this year, a client of Nezbeth's was confronted by a bear on a remote path out in New Brunswick. He called out for his dog, Bico, a Grassroots K9-trained Dutch Shepard. Bico came immediately, and ran barking straight at the bear, which turned tail and ran off with the dog chasing. The man called for Bico to return, and it did, walking with him, watching the woods carefully all the way back to their vehicle.

Grassroots K9 helps train dogs for pets, and also working dogs often used for security purposes. Nezbeth spends the time to get to know the owners, and help them understand their dogs. "Every dog is different, and every owner has different goals, but the dog training industry traditionally has a very cookie-cutter approach," says Nezbeth.

Originally from Brampton, he launched his business while he was living in Florida. In 2013, together with his wife and young daughter, they moved back to Brampton. "I've travelled all over, but nothing compares."

Back at home, he began searching for funding to continue his dog training venture, when he came across the Government of Ontario's Starter Company program, delivered through the Brampton Entrepreneur Centre. The program funds youth entrepreneurs up to \$5,000 to start or grow a business.

"My motivation was the money originally," says Nezbeth. "But what I learned in the program – marketing, networking, execution, organization – that was huge for my business. The learning by far outweighed the money."

Nezbeth's approach to training is grounded in his own studies in human psychology and learning theory, paired with thousands of hours of hands-on experience. It took some persistence to initially acquire that experience. "There's no formal apprentice program to become a dog trainer," says Nezbeth. "I contacted more than 30 trainers trying to find one who would be willing to let me work with them. I picked up dog poop for a year before I got to train any dogs."

For pet owners, Nezbeth jets all over Brampton with a mobile service and hosts group sessions around the city, including regular summer weekend sessions in Garden Square. Real-world distraction during training sessions helps ensure that once the dog is trained, there's no second guessing about where an owner can take their dog.

His customized approach is also successful with working dogs. Grassroots K9 is gaining a reputation for the dogs he trains for private owners and police and security organizations. He currently has two dogs going through evaluations for Massachusetts State Police, and has other dogs placed across North America, like Bico.

“The protective instincts come from the bond between the dog and the owner,” says Nezbeth. The goal is a stable dog that can be a family companion, but with the ability to deter problems. Like bear problems.

While running his full-time business, Nezbeth stills finds time to stay connected with the Brampton Entrepreneur Centre and participants in the Summer Company. He’s often talking about his experiences as an entrepreneur with others, and building contacts to share information and resources.

The Starter Company program is one of the many resources entrepreneurs with plans to launch or grow a business can tap into. The Brampton Entrepreneur Centre runs events throughout the year to support business and connect entrepreneurs. They also offer individual consultations and advice, and are the access point for funding and programs to support start-up and established businesses. Go to Brampton.ca/bec for more information.