

Meet Sue Govedich: Telecommunications Training Specialist

By Tara Caimi

Based on the roaring laughter coming from the computer lab in 23 Willard, you might guess there was a party going on inside. If you poked your head through the door, however, you'd be surprised to find something entirely different—a telephone training session.

Sue Govedich, telecommunications training specialist in ITS Training Services, has provided training for more years than she cares to remember. Of course, she is disposed to point out, that training hasn't always been directed toward people.

In addition to a long-lived, full-time career at Penn State, Sue happens to be among the nation's top-most trainers of Siberian Huskies, having started training and showing her dogs more than thirty years ago.

Today, in her cozy office tucked away in ITS Training Services' office suite, Sue reminisces about the path she's taken, and where she's landed up until now. "I grew up in Altoona, then I lived all over—Hartford, Maryland, Washington D.C. I worked in a motorcycle shop in California," she ponders, remembering her days on the open road. "Then I got into dogs, sold my motorcycle, and bought a camper to start traveling and showing dogs," she says with a grin.

Eventually, Sue made her way back to her roots in central Pennsylvania where, in addition to her job, she enjoys spending time outdoors. "That L.A. freeway gets old," she says. "I just love being in nature. I could get lost for hours taking a walk"—an undertaking, she admits, that is reasonably achievable in the mountains of central Pennsylvania.

When asked about her career at Penn State, Sue takes a moment to remember it all. "I started at Penn State many years ago in the Office of the Physical Plant. Then I went to Accounts in the Computer Building. Then I saw a (training) job in telephone services, and I thought it was right up my alley."

"The training career really appealed to me because of my history in training dogs," she says casually. "It's really not that different. I spent years training people how to motivate their dogs and get them to do what they want," she smiles. "Now I train people to get their telephones to do what they want."

The trick for Sue is to figure out what methods work for different people. "Everybody learns in a different way, and you have to figure out how they learn and know how to adapt your training to that individual's learning style," she explains. Then she jokes, "They're (the people) the hardest things to train—the dogs are actually pretty easy!"

As far as telephone training has gone over the years, the concepts have remained the same through most of the systems Sue has encountered. "Telephone features are

telephone features,” she says. “I’ve seen the same features carry through from 1970 to today. You may just access them differently, or they are called something different, like the call pick up feature. It is the same, but on Centrex you dial a code, on VoIP you push a feature button,” she explains.

It doesn’t take long, chatting casually with Sue in her office, to realize that she is a naturally friendly and easy-going, no-nonsense kind of a person. When asked what she likes most about her job, her answer is not surprising—the people.

“The best part about the job is working with the people and helping them to be comfortable. The people are great, and they’re so grateful for any kind of help because so often we sit down at a computer and we’re told, ‘Here’s your phone—use it. Here’s your computer—use it.’” Sue pauses for a moment before adding, “There are so many other frustrating things in life—at least they ought to be able to use the plain old telephone!”

Sue currently specializes in Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephones and features, as well as voice mail and Polycom videoconferencing. She makes sure her sessions are interactive and hands-on whenever possible and tries to focus on those features that people are likely to use on an everyday basis. “You’d be surprised at how many people are afraid to put a call on hold or transfer a call for fear of losing the callers,” she says. “I try to give real life examples, so they (participants) can visualize how they might use the features back in the office.”

Judging by the noises that can be heard through the closed door of Sue’s training sessions, participants definitely appreciate the effort. “The crowd gets really crazy,” Sue says with a chuckle. “They do have a good time!”

The interactive training sessions are Sue’s favorite part of the job, which also includes staying up-to-date on all the new technology that becomes available on a regular basis. Daily activity can include learning about new functions, turning that knowledge into seminar materials, and teaching a group of people how to use multiple models of telecommunications systems.

After a hard day’s work of poring over the features and functions of Penn State’s telecommunications systems, an evening of relaxation at home is well-deserved. For Sue, that means changing clothes and heading out to the kennel to spend the evening with her eight Siberian huskies and one American Staffordshire terrier.

Though Sue is not currently showing her Siberians, she remains active with the dogs she still has. “I spend the better portion of the evening out with the dogs; grooming the dogs; training the dogs; exercising the dogs,” Sue says. “I put a grooming table out on the patio and groom one dog at a time while the other dogs run.”

To most people, this would seem like a lot of hard work, but to Sue, who has been breeding and showing dogs for over thirty years and has seen literally hundreds of dogs go through her kennel, it is a routine part of her life. “It’s work, but it’s also a stress

reliever,” she says. “Once I start grooming and interacting with the dogs, it takes all the stress from the day away.”

Sue admits that having dogs is a big commitment, but the rewards make it all worthwhile. In her heyday of breeding and showing multiple champion dogs, Sue would spend most weekends at dog shows and sometimes had as many as thirty dogs in her kennel. “It’s hard but it’s just like anything else—like a working mother—you juggle your home life with your work life. You just learn how to do that,” she quips. “And no—technology doesn’t teach you that,” she adds laughing.

“I’ve done a lot of winning. I’ve set a lot of world records within the Siberian Husky breed. All of those wins with the dogs I have bred, nurtured, trained, groomed ... make all the hard work well worth it. To win and be successful is rewarding in itself,” she says.

“In this, just like in life, you set goals to achieve, and once you achieve those, you set more goals. I feel like I’ve been blessed to own some of the dogs that I’ve owned,” Sue explains. “Most people will never experience that, so I feel really blessed and fortunate for having that opportunity.”

When asked if one dog has held a special place in her heart through all these years, Sue doesn’t hesitate, “Khan,” she says.

A few moments pass, and Sue brings up her Web site showing photos of all the dogs and trophies from the past—remembering the years they won and how different they all were. The awards are too numerous to mention.

“I could probably go on and tell you about a special moment with each one of them,” she says, but Genghis Khan was the pick of the litter sired by Sue’s first show dog. “Khan was so smart,” she reminisces. “He’s probably what got me hooked.”

Through all those years of working with dogs and working with people in the training environment, Sue has managed to make some analogies and transfer some valuable skills from one setting to the next. “Everyone needs to learn in steps. You build the steps starting at the beginning with step A, then add step B, then step C. You need to start at the beginning and build up,” she explains. And when it comes to learning, Sue knows for a fact that you *can* teach an old dog new tricks. “Some personalities are more resistant. I don’t think it has anything to do with age at all. It’s mindset, willingness,” she insists.

Through work and life, Sue has met and continues to correspond with people from all over the globe. She truly enjoys the social aspect of her job and of all she’s done that has allowed her to meet so many people and experience so many personalities.

Though she currently is not as heavily involved in dog training and showing as she has been in the past, she has no intention of giving up dogs for good. “I can’t imagine my life without dogs,” she says. “Dogs are companions—they’re unconditional.” With regard to

her philosophy on the working nature of her dogs, Sue asserts, “They’re my buddies first because they’re your friends longer than they ever are show dogs.”

When it comes to finding ways to fill up her time, Sue has never struggled. Over the years she’s done everything from boating to dog-mushing, in addition to her telecommunications training career and her consuming commitment to dog training.

But all those years and all those dogs couldn’t diminish Sue’s love of the open road. She recently resumed motorcycle riding, and it has again become one of her favorite pastimes. “All that stress just melts away when I’m on the bike,” Sue says with a wistful gaze. “You get on that bike; you’re out in nature; the wind’s blowing in your hair, and you just kind of relax.”

And that’s what it’s all about for Sue, who lives by her own mantra: “I try to live my life without regret and not take everything so seriously. There is no sense worrying about something I have no control over,” she says, adding, “True friendship, relationships, trust, and accountability are attributes of extreme importance to me.”

For more information on Sue’s dog show and training awards and some spectacular photos of her champions, visit <http://www.personal.psu.edu/staff/s/a/sag/siberians.html>

Sue is happy to teach you about the features your VoIP telephone during one of her free training sessions. To check for seminar availability, visit <http://its.psu.edu/training/>.