

Meet the Theater World's Go-To Dog Trainer

Bill Berloni has trained dozens of dogs for productions like "Annie" and "Legally Blonde."

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Bill Berloni is the theater world's go-to animal trainer. The New York resident has trained dozens of dogs for "Annie" productions, and most recently trained the pooch for Broadway's "Legally Blonde."

Berloni began his 32-year training career in 1976 as an out-of-work teenage actor who wanted a part in a new musical based on the Little Orphan Annie comic strips.

"They needed a dog for this new show, and they couldn't afford a dog trainer, and the director offered me a part in the show," Berloni told Reuters. "He said, 'All you have to do is find and train a dog for us for no money'."

Berloni went a local humane society near the theater, Connecticut's famed Goodspeed Opera House, and found the mutt who would become Sandy, the dog who Annie befriends on her road to finding Daddy Warbucks.

"Interestingly enough, when the show opened on Broadway and became successful, I was 20 years old, and they didn't think I was established enough to do the road companies, so they hired another firm to do the first two national tours," Berloni says.

Berloni credits positive training for his enduring success with canine actors. "Growing up on a farm, I had a dog and a cat, and I thought that if I could make a dog think the theater is its home and the child actor is a part of the family, maybe it would do the same things my pets did," Berloni says. "It was the beginning of a positive reinforcement thing, and back in the '70s, no one had heard about that."