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Doggy Daycare

By Eve Kelly | Published Thursday, July 12, 2007

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When her third child bolted off to college, my friend Janice thought she was free of her domestic duties. She returned to the workplace -- college is expensive, and a bunch of her friends had already made the jump. What she hadn't reckoned with was Dutchess, her golden retriever. "She's just not adjusting to me being gone," Janice told me. "She's started to pee on the carpet, and she's scratched the back door something awful. She just doesn't like being alone and cooped up, I guess, and I can sympathize." I was driving back from Coronado Beach when I spotted a possible solution to Janice's canine conundrum: Camp Diggity Dogs, Doggy Daycare, Hotel & Grooming (619-702-4090; www.campdiggitydogs.com), just off Imperial Avenue. "You don't have to bring your dog in every day," explained owner Ted Greenberg. "If you do it two or three times a week, that gives the dog enough time to get their energy out. They're more relaxed and sedate between visits. And it's important for puppies -- the first year of a dog's life is when it learns to socialize. Dogs that are playful and don't have problems are dogs that were brought to dog parks or dog beaches at a young age."

Greenberg decided to go with the high-volume-equals-low-prices model for his facility (**\$23** per day or ten days for **\$21** per day; **\$29** per 24 hours for overnight

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boarding; luxury suites \$45). His place is 11,000 square feet -- large enough to hold 39 dogs without anybody feeling crowded. The 1200-square-foot common room features dog beds and dog cots, while the luxury suites offer TV and people-beds. "My own dog isn't very interested in TV," explained Greenberg, "but some dogs are. We put on puppy videos, and a lot of the dogs respond to the barking and seeing puppies move around."

But doggy day care doesn't mean hours spent parked in front of the screen. Greenberg is proud that 4,000 of his square feet are outdoors. "Our outdoor area was originally an asphalt parking lot. I installed half-inch green artificial turf so that their paws wouldn't get scratched or dried up; it feels very soft when they roll on it. I also installed a small swimming pool. We recently hired four new people, and they're all very good at interacting with the dogs. If the dogs are lying around, they'll get them up and start playing chase, or they'll throw balls around. The dogs seem to love ropes with knots at one end -- they play tug-of-war with it." (If owners want to see their pups in action, they can log onto the day care's webcam and see if Fido's running by. "It's mounted outside. I have one dog who's very active, jumping in and out of the pool all day. Her owner travels a lot and loves to watch her over the Internet.")

The outdoor environment also makes waste management a fairly easy routine. "I had people dig through the asphalt and put in six palm trees. The trees provide ambiance and shade, and there's a three-foot by three-foot dirt patch around each of them. The dogs will generally gravitate toward going to the bathroom around the trees. Of course, it doesn't always work out that way, so two or three times a week, we spray the turf down with a mixture of Simple Green, Lysol, and D-Molish -- that's a cleaner recommended by Animal Control. It kills any bacteria. We also vacuum once a week."

The dogs have the run of the place -- there are no cages. Greenberg explained how he made the system work. "I screen the dogs very carefully when they come in. I want to keep out the aggressive dogs. Some signs of aggressiveness are ears back, a tense tail pointing down. It means he's ready to fight. If a dog's tail is wagging and he puts the front end of his body down and stretches, he's ready to



play."

Screening begins by bringing the dog "into a room by himself. Then I bring in a gentle, quiet, submissive dog and see how the visitor dog reacts. If he puts his head on top of the other dog's neck, it means he wants to dominate. I'm standing right there, so if anything happens, I can grab them both. But if that first encounter goes well, I bring in a friendly but feistier dog and see if they play together. Finally, I bring in my dog. He's a very good test, because he's friendly and loves to play. If a dog is aggressive, my dog will growl and get ready to fight back. I probably don't allow about one out of every eight dogs. Also, I don't allow pit bulls. Not that I don't like pit bulls -- they can be good dogs -- but if they ever did get in a fight, they could do a lot of damage."

(While he hasn't had any fights so far, Greenberg notes that despite the best of screenings, he "can't promise that the dogs will never fight. But all of my people know how to break up dogs in a fight. The best way is to grab the aggressive dog by the haunches in front of the hind legs and pull them back. It gets them off balance, and they can't generate any power to stop you. We also have a hose with a fireman's nozzle -- if we have to, we can squirt the dog in the face, and that will break it up.")

Greenberg noted that if you can't make it to him, he'll come to you via Camp Diggity Dog's van service. "We can hold up to 12 dogs -- we have straps they can tie into via collar or harness so that they don't slip and fall and benches where your feet would normally go." Transportation rates are **\$8** each way within three miles; beyond three miles, call for prices.

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