

These days, every dog has his day of luxury

From posh hotels to swanky salons, owners have plenty of options when they want to pamper their pets.

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FANWOOD -- Steven Parker never had a dog of his own. Now he has dozens -- at least as guests.

Parker and his brother, Jason, own K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotel, a posh retreat in Fanwood that boasts human-quality amenities for its doggie guests.

These include imported Evian water, sliced chicken breast for dinner, personal playtime and a turn-down service before bedtime in individual rooms -- this is a cage-free establishment -- with digital cable television, Simmons dog beds and Gucci mattresses.

What a dog's life!

A day's stay at K-9 starts at \$25, an overnight stay at \$40. Luxury packages are available.

The Parkers' venture, opened earlier this year, is part of the growing, multibillion-dollar dog-care business.

In the past decade, annual revenue for the pet industry has doubled in size to \$34 billion, according to USA Today. That includes everything from pet food and toys to fees for dog walkers, groomers, even pet therapists.

An Internet search or a stop at a bookstore will direct pet people to dozens of resources listing thousands of pet-friendly motels, hotels and inns. People who just want to go out for a few hours with their beloved pet have the choice of



STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID BERGELAND

Steven Parker gets a licking from Sandy at K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotel in Fanwood.



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Neo stretches out for a rest on an oriental rug at the K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotel, a posh retreat for dogs in Fanwood.

some 10 dog parks throughout Central Jersey, sponsored by towns and counties. (See **Page B-4** for details.)

The opening of Best Friends Pet Resort and Salon on Route 22 in North Plainfield in 1998 reflected the change in how people wanted to see their dogs and pets treated when they are away from home. It's not kenneling anymore -- it's doggy day care.

Smart Central Jersey businesspeople like the Parkers also are creating new ventures to support today's dog lovers who don't want to leave their pet at home while they're at work or away on vacation.

For example, in June two women opened Camp Bow Wow in Bridgewater. This dog-care and overnight-boarding facility is part of a national franchise, with more than 40 locations.

At Camp Bow Wow, themed indoor and outdoor areas, such as Rover's Retreat or Spot's Spot, are designed to keep each dog stimulated and sheltered during inclement weather. The various play areas also allow dogs to be grouped according to size and temperament so that dogs can play with friends their own speed.

"Many households have dual-working families, and the dog is by himself all day," said Randy DeFazio, who owns Camp Bow Wow with Sherri Hayes. "If a dog is interacting with people and other dogs during the day, it is happier and more well-adjusted."

The facility offers daily day-care services, and is open from 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday. Overnight boarding is also available. Animals enjoy private "cabins" -- individual cages -- and are treated to playtime and rest periods.

"We will even board two family dogs together," DeFazio said.

Caring for others is second nature to DeFazio and Hayes. DeFazio was a human-resources director and Hayes an operations manager when they worked together at various assisted-living and managed-care companies. They opened more than 30 facilities throughout the East Coast but got tired of extensive traveling -- and coming home to find their own dogs unhappy after stays at kennels.

That's when they decided to open Camp Bow Wow.

"I think the assisted-living industry is a lot like the kennel business," DeFazio said. "It's about care and compassion."

Care and concern also are part of the package at K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotel in Fanwood. As part of their business and pet-caring philosophy, the Parkers want to know as much as possible about each of their hotel clients.

"We want to know every detail about your pet's feeding habits," Jason Parker said. "Does he or she get fed once a day, several times a day, and if you have a special ritual that you follow when it comes to feeding your pet. We also encourage our families to bring their pet's food, favorite toys and even their blankets. We want your pet to feel as much at home as possible."

The pet resort/spa is a new effort for the Scotch Plains entrepreneurs, who have been in the dog-walking and pet-care business for six years.

"It all started because I never had a dog of my own," Steven Parker said. "One year, when my neighbor was taking a holiday, he asked me to do him a favor and walk his dog. Through recommendations, we soon found we were caring for many dogs. Not only feeding them, we were walking them, and frequently playing with them in the comfort of their own home."

At that time, Parker was interested in a career in law enforcement.

"I had planned to go to college and major in criminal justice, thinking that I would work for the canine patrol. All of those aspirations ended when we started our pet-walking business."

The duo's K-9, opened in January, has 10 individual rooms. Their goal was to create a space to reflect their caring and high-class aspirations. They developed the idea of a doggie resort hotel after attending a variety of pet-care seminars. Right now, they have a waiting list for reservations through September, and hope to expand their space by next year.

K-9's waiting room has a granite counter, marble floors and wall painted in a faux style. Gracing the wall is an oil painting of springer spaniels frolicking in the woods. Both the individual doggie guest rooms and shared areas are cleaned frequently.

The cage-free atmosphere of K-9 appealed to Nancy Benucci of Warren.

"Our 3-year-old male cocker spaniel is usually very nervous," she said. "After going to K-9 Resorts, I'd never board him anywhere else."

"Even though they provide the most fabulous mattresses, I brought my dog's bed and one of my T-shirts. I did not want him to feel alone and depressed. ... They go out of their way for your pet and your family."

Gary Bernstein of Berkeley Heights is particular about where he boards his labradoodle. And because he works in Westfield, he was looking for a place to not only board his dog, but for doggie day care. K-9 Resorts met his specifications.

"I drop her off at about 9 a.m. and pick her up in the afternoon," Bernstein said. "The owners are genuine, and sincerely care for not only the pets that are boarded, they offer the same care and concern for the pets that are there to have a fun day. They take time to learn all they can about the family, and particularly the likes and dislikes of the animal."

"They have a lovely indoor play area for the dogs, as well as space outdoors. As Fairway loves to play with other dogs, she is very happy when she is there. ... She is so tuned into the place, I believe she wants me to take her back there."

Both establishments also have requirements about who they will serve.

In order to maintain a safe environment, Jason Parker said K-9 Resorts maintains a strict policy on aggressive or unsocialized dogs: They are not welcome.

At Camp Bow Wow, each new camper must be interviewed, be spayed or neutered and be up-to-date with all medical shots.

"When we first meet a dog, we examine how he interacts with other dogs, and

we make decision whether he'd be a good fit here," DeFazio said. "We have turned away dogs because we want to maintain a structured and playful environment."

What: K-9 Resorts Daycare and Luxury Hotel

Where: 43 South Ave., Fanwood

Details: (908) 490-0808, www.k9resorts.com

Hours: 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday. 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Checkout time: 12:30 p.m.

Programs and costs: Day-care program: Monday to Friday, 7 a.m to 7 p.m. \$25 per day. Overnight stay: \$40 per night; families also can pay an additional day-care fee which allows dogs to play with other dogs for \$19 per day, or a play-package for \$6 for 15 minutes of private play with a staff member. Luxury packages available.

FYI: Request a tour of the premises. Tour Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. **C Dog Behavior Requirements:** Dogs must be 100 percent friendly in order to stay at K-9 Resorts. Dogs wishing to participate in the day-care program must be 100 percent people and dog friendly. Dogs must be prescreened, registered and accepted, prior to any reservations.

Resort Services (priced accordingly): Evian Spring Water, Frosty Paws Doggie Ice Cream, sliced chicken breast, preparation of special meals, food from client's home, medication, extra feedings, gourmet treats, personal playtime, additional outdoor walks. Room service will deliver two homemade delicious treats stuffed with real peanut butter.

Turn-down service: Room service will deliver an after-dinner dog mint, tune your dog's TV to its favorite evening show, and prepare it for bedtime. Dogs can receive a warm, relaxing dog bath with imported shampoo from France.

What: Camp Bow Wow, dog daycare and overnight boarding

Where: 10 W. Chimney Rock Road, Bridgewater

Details: (732) 805-0888; www.campbowwowusa.com

Hours: 6:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday for daily day-care services. Overnight and weekend boarding is available in private "cabins," along with playtime and rest periods.

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