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OUT AND ABOUT

In a world full of changes, it's nice to find stability. Cottonwood Kennels provides that stability for area pet owners, say co-owners Penny Vardell and Tom Bonfili. Penny and Tom, along with Manager Rhonda Beitzel and a staff of 27, care for the pets left in their charge. Over half of these employees have been with Cottonwood Kennels for five years or longer. Connie Duras has been there for 20 years. During the summer months and on holidays, student employees also work at Cottonwood Kennels.

Depending on the season, 75 large dogs, 30 smaller dogs, and 15 to 25 cats spend a day or longer here. Among them is Gracie Goodwin, a white Havachon (a mixed breed of Havanese and Bichon Frise), who enjoys her home away from home, says her owner Sidney. "She loves to come play with the other smaller dogs and she usually gets a good report card," she says.

When Gracie arrives for day care or boarding, she is met at the car by one of the staff members. As a repeat customer, she is greeted by name. She and the staff know the routine. If Pilar Heffelfinger, small dog captain, or any other staff member in the play area notice any changes, they let Sidney know. Noticeable changes may include not drinking water, being lethargic, or wanting to take a nap. The dogs are provided with time-outs for breaks if/ as needed.

Although staff members rotate among the dogs and cats on a regular basis, detailed information is current and available for them in a notebook. "We try to make our groups even for the most enjoyment both for the animals and staff," says Rhonda.

Client Jon Lounsbury comments about his Jack Russell. "Rascal likes the puppy play group where they're all the same size. Sometimes she runs around or just sits in the shade and watches."

For less social dogs, private individual time is provided. They have their own runs with access to the outdoors. Since some of the kennel's canine customers don't enjoy playing with others, they receive three private play sessions with a staff member or a private pasture walk where the dogs can enjoy great aromas such as sheep, chickens, ducks, an alpaca, and other animals as well.

During inclement weather, the dogs are kept in covered kennels with runs. They are given exercise time outside their runs as well. Snow is removed from the AstroTurf yards before the dogs go out.

"We like to keep them outside as much as possible," Rhonda explains. "But we don't want them to get overheated or tired." The staff has a bucket of coats, parkas, and sweaters at the ready if it's cold. "They go out and come back (when it's cold outside)," Rhonda chuckles. If there is a rainstorm with thunder and lightning, the staff hustles into action and brings the dogs inside.

If it's too cold, the play groups are cancelled for both large and small dogs. "We have 15 private yards where they can play with their toys," says Rhonda.

When it's hot, staff members provide water options for those animals that prefer it. A baby pool, misters, and even hoses keep the canines happy.

KCE, named after Joyce and Rigomar Thurmer's daughters, Katherine, Christina, and Elizabeth, "loves to come here, although he's happy to see me," Joyce says. Joyce laughs when she talks about

her 9-year-old Wirehaired Dachshund and his love of aquatic time.

Twelve-year-old black standard poodle, Celine, has had an "absolutely positive experience" at Cottonwood Kennels, says owner Herb Wiechman. "The staff pays attention to her needs and reacts accordingly," says his wife, Larrane.

Cottonwood Kennels isn't only for dogs. Cats have their own special place too. "Most do great once they get the lay of the land and settle in," says Rhonda. "Others are grumpy and aren't thrilled about sharing the room."

The room Rhonda speaks of is the cattery, which offers separate cages, windows, ledges, scratching posts, and even a plant or two where naps are taken. These felines enjoy periodic time out of their cages, and they even may keep an employee company on the futon in the neighboring staff room.

For both cats and dogs, finding food that works provides a challenge on occasion, Rhonda says. Platters of 10 different items are prepared. "Penny has cooked chicken for the picky ones," Rhonda

comments. Having a farm location helps with food options. Eggs, pot roast, and chicken pot pies have been known to be on the menu.

Although the level of care for visitors remains high, Penny says, changes do occur. "We make internal changes as we see the need. Policies are always changing. They're mostly about how we bring in meds and food. Everything is always evolving. We try to find better ways to accommodate our dogs and cats."

In some relocation situations, the kennel staff will help with transporting the pet to the airport or ensure that needed vaccinations are given. "Sometimes when a home is for sale, the owners will bring their pet here for the day," says Rhonda.

This past summer, Cottonwood Kennels boarded several ferrets, guinea pig, and a hedgehog. According to Penny, "We board anything that isn't a reptile." That has also included birds, rabbits, and hamsters. "This is the first time in 37 years that we boarded a fish," she says with a laugh.

Finding appropriate food for these visitors keeps Penny and the staff on their toes. "The hedgehog eats mealworms," she says. While the animals arrive in their own cages with supplies, Cottonwood Kennels provides food and bedding, or they will give the pet the food and medicine that the owners bring.

As boarders come more frequently to Cottonwood Kennels, they become increasingly comfortable, Penny notes. "Rico the guinea pig now comes out of his house more often than before, for example," she says.

When certain guests need medicine, there is a carefully marked cabinet in the front office with notes on what they are to receive and the frequency. Notations with specific directions are also found on cages, along with dietary and/or medical needs.

Family members of any new boarder, whether for the day or long-term, receive a welcome letter and a copy of the monthly "Cottonwood Tails" newsletter. Each animal has a tracking sheet complete with notations about exercise, eating, and playtime/pasture walks. Attitude information is provided for the front office staff. Report cards are included if the families choose to receive them.

Cottonwood Kennels is located at 7275 Valmont Road in Boulder. It is open seven days a week from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The phone number is 303-442-2602. More information is available at www.CottonwoodKennels.com.

COTTONWOOD KENNELS

By Marty Coffin Evans



Manager Rhonda Beitzel and Owner Penny Vardell with their dogs Lulu and Michael