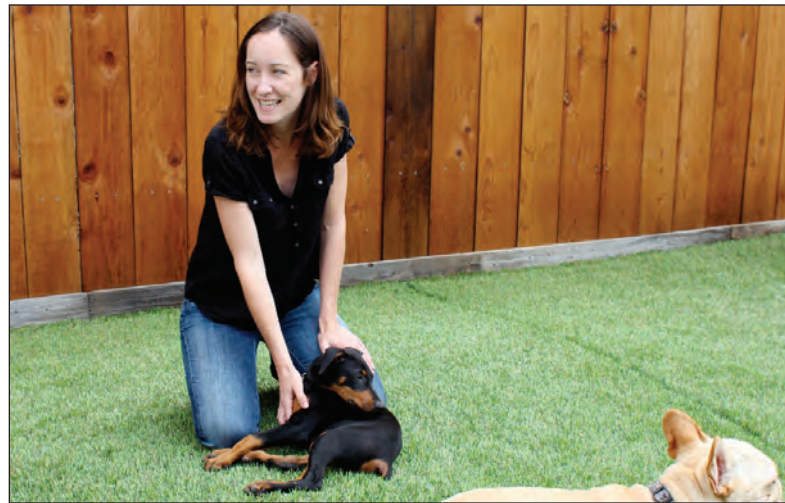




IN BUSINESS

by Flora Kontilis

It's Pooch Playtime at Dioji in Santa Barbara



Owner Jeannie Wendel plays with pets at Dioji K-9 cage-free doggie daycare facility

At Dioji K-9 resort, pooch playtime is the name of the game. This cage-free daycare facility first opened in Goleta in 2007, and just before their fourth anniversary in the business, owners Susan Vasquez and Jeannie and Bryce Wendel bring a second Dioji location to Santa Barbara at Milpas and Yanonali Streets. Though both locations are daycare facilities, the Goleta site offers overnight stays for traveling pet owners at \$75 per night. Other likely clientele include college students with classes to attend, residents that work during the day, and even tourists who might want to go wine tasting for the day and need a temporary place for their dogs.

The inspiration for Dioji came from Jeannie and Bryce's lab, Kirby. Jeannie says she and her husband were living in Manhattan Beach when they decided to get a puppy. But, "We were working long hours," Wendel says, "so we tried out daycare facilities, and we just weren't happy with what we found. Some places were big warehouses where

they wouldn't let you see where your dogs went." She adds, "We even tried dog sitters. One ended up taking our money and not checking on the dog; Kirby lost nine pounds while my husband and I were away on a ten-day trip. After that we just wanted to do this right."

Wendel and her husband teamed up with Wendel's college roommate, Susan, for a business plan. They all decided on a cage-free environment that felt like home. With an expansive yard, pets have room to run and play, allowing for plenty of exercise. Play yards are sectioned off by the size of the dogs so small dogs are not overwhelmed by oversized playmates.

The First Day Is Free

"We have forty-five employees in total," Wendel says. "We took a lot of time interviewing and finding the right people who could handle the job. Everyone is well trained to understand the dogs and their behaviors." She adds that the dogs are never left alone; for every ten dogs there is at least one



Jeannie Wendel (left) with Shae Berg, manager of Dioji's Santa Barbara location

staff member to watch over them. And if more dogs come in throughout the day, Wendel says there is additional staff on call to help. "We call in more people as more dogs come in," she explains, "but on average we have about twenty to thirty dogs a day."


Though the amount of pooches may seem like a handful, Wendel says she is glad to not have any horror stories to report. "On their first day, we screen all the dogs for temperament. Observation is important so we

don't have any bad behavior or fights between pets," Wendel says. Along with good behavior, dogs should be up to date with vaccines and spayed or neutered within six months. Customers can also watch their pets via a webcam. "The camera points at the pool where there's always a lot of action," Wendel says.

Wendel says that the customers drove the expansion into Santa Barbara. Some clients were traveling from Montecito and Carpinteria to the Goleta location. "We had enough people say, 'Oh if only you guys were closer I could come more often,' so we knew we needed to bring this closer," Wendel says.

In the future, Wendel says that she and her business partners want to expand to more locations; however, "We don't want it to become a franchise out of fear that the quality would drop. We put our hearts into this," she said.

Dioji's Santa Barbara branch is located at 822 E. Yanonali Street and is open 7 am to 7 pm Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm on Saturday, and closed on Sunday. Rates per dog are \$40 for a full day, \$30 for half a day; there are discounted rates for puppies and package deals offered for frequent guests, and *the first day is free*. Dioji also offers an expansive selection of pet food, treats, and toys at both locations. Visit dioji.com or call 845-0500 for more information.



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