



Coastal Point
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Ashley's Pet Ranch makes canines feel at home

By Ryan Saxton
Staff Reporter

A shift from northern Wilmington to the lower, southeast region of the state 15 years ago might have seemed like a drastic adjustment for Dave Goodman, but there's one thing he couldn't leave behind: his love for dogs. Just months ago, he proved that, after transforming his 13.5-acre wooded property to the ultimate getaway for his canine companions. With help and expertise from business associate Camille Rossi, Ashley's Pet Ranch was born.

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Dave Goodman and Camille Rossi enjoy the weather last week with their two dogs and a frequent client at Ashley's Pet Ranch.

Situated just west of Bear Trap Dunes along Central Avenue near Ocean View, the ranch offers pet-sitting and cage-free boarding possibilities for pets – unique in the area.



"The whole premise behind it," said Goodman, "was that I wanted to start a camp for dogs – somewhere they could come and relax while their owners were out for a few days or a week." After establishing the idea of a ranch, Goodman enclosed his spacious back yard and transformed his back room into a corral, divided into three separate sections, for privacy and solitude, such as at feeding time. A sunroom already serves as an ideal space for smaller dogs to enjoy, while he anticipates putting the finishing touches on a front yard enclosure in the near future.

"We've got plenty of room to accommodate the dogs," Goodman said, "and we've got everything they'd want here. They have plenty of area to run around and get their exercise, and they can be comfortable inside at night, or if it's too cold or rainy."

From a heated and air-conditioned doghouse, designed and built by Goodman, to a play pool and soothing music throughout the house, Ashley's Pet Ranch can ensure visiting pups will be living in the lap of luxury. A hiking trail circles through the woods out back, and daily walks come as part of the service.

With the ranch fashioned out of Goodman's home, owners can be assured that someone will be there, tending their pet at all times. And because Ashley's isn't a traditional kennel, they do not accommodate aggressive dogs. So, those who have checked in have already made some furry friends in the process.

"The focus of the ranch is to offer something that still allows the dogs to be safe, comfortable and happy," said Goodman. "It's an alternative for putting them in a kennel, where they'd be cooped up for days. While some kennels can be nice, the whole ordeal can be traumatic for an animal. You can tell them that you'll be back later, but all they know is that their owner's gone and they're in a cage."

Prior to dropping their four-legged friends off at the ranch, owners fill out a sheet that includes all the specifics about their pet, from eating habits and medical history to bathing preferences.

"When the dogs are here, they get our complete attention," emphasized Goodman.

Clients are welcome to bring their own toys, beds or other favorites from home. While all pets are required to be caught up on shots and vaccinations, those that are not yet spayed or neutered can be cared for in their own private corral.

Owners supply food and feeding schedules, as habits vary from pet to pet.

"Some dogs are picky and precise about what they eat," he added, "and some have allergies. By letting the owner bring the food, we can be sure that the dogs are getting what they're used to."

The dogs are not fed any table scraps or "people food," either.

Dogs of all sizes are welcome at the ranch, as can be seen from Goodman's large black Lab, The Beast, and Rossi's miniature Doberman-mix, Diamond.

Previously working as a licensed contractor, Goodman has effectively turned his home into a retreat for dogs. Rossi, born and raised in the Bronx before raising her own family in Yonkers, N.Y., worked for four years with her daughter's pet-training and -sitting business before teaming up with Goodman.

"Even though the economy's the way it is," she said, "this is still a thriving business. People have pets and sometimes they need a nice place to bring them."

Previously working in the real estate business, as well, has given Rossi the professional know-how to accompany her adoration of canines.

Local pet owners have already started to take advantage of the service, for short day trips at the outlets or a round of golf, or for weeks at a time. Those coming to the beach from out-of-town can find Ashley's Pet Ranch as a simple solution if their summer retreat does not accommodate pets, or if they want to give them a care-free lodging alternative.

"I'm like the camp director," said Goodman. "I can enjoy my time here outside with an iced tea and throw a ball for the dogs. Nothing makes me happier."

Still fresh from opening to the public, Ashley's Pet Ranch has only seen a few clients so far, but both Goodman and Rossi are confident that will all change this summer season.

"We can accommodate up to 20 dogs here," noted Goodman. "I'd eventually like to expand a little, but for now, we just want to be here for people."

In addition to the pet-sitting and cage-free lodging, Ashley's Pet Ranch also provides house calls, at-home walks and a pick-up and drop-off service for areas within Sussex County, Del., and Ocean City or Ocean Pines, Md.

Rates for doggy daycare start at \$25 for a single dog, while two dogs from the same household can visit the ranch for \$40 per full day. A single dog overnight rate starts at \$30, while two dogs of the same household visit for \$45 or three for \$60. Pick-up and drop-off services, as well as pet-walking and sitting at the owner's residence start at a local rate of \$20 and are subject to change based on locality, duties and number of pets.

Ashley's Pet Ranch services are by appointment only, so call (302) 537-1030 or (302) 344-1323 for more information, including details and rates. Pet owners are also encouraged to visit www.ashleypetranch.com online for additional information and services.
