

Published August 28th, 2013

## Local Business Goes to the Dogs

By Cathy Dausman



Nathalie Lambrecht with Rudolph. Photo Cathy Dausman

Make no bones about it: Nathalie Lambrecht's business has gone - quite literally - to the dogs. She's happy with that. Lambrecht, you see, is a self-employed Lamorinda dog sitter with a 10-year track record and a host of loyal customers, both the two- and four-footed kind.

"It's been incredible for me," Lambrecht said of her dog-sitting decade. "It's been a great way to get to know my neighbors." She admits being scared of dogs as a child, but two neighbor dogs - Bailey, an English springer spaniel, and Snickers, a mixed breed - changed that one summer.

"I'd knock on those families' doors, and ask to play with the dogs," she said. It didn't hurt that her older brother cared for neighborhood dogs, and she trailed after him when he worked.

"Word spread pretty fast," she said, and by the time she was in middle school she was dog-sitting regularly. Lambrecht fostered two dogs one summer and became a certified Guide Dogs for the Blind handler, almost bringing a puppy home before changing her mind. "This [dog sitting job] has taught me a lot about animal care," she said.

As a child Lambrecht thought she might become a veterinarian. At 16, she took a job at Rheem Veterinary Medical Hospital, where she worked for about a year. The work has not always been dog heaven, she said, recalling the time she was bitten by the dog she was walking, who wanted to chase a passing dog. But she persists in walking and training her charges, using only affection and correction.

Lambrecht said her years of sitting have been "a reliable income source," especially since she saved all her money when she was younger. When she reached college, she took on the additional task of house-sitting.

Nancy Bennett met Lambrecht when she was a high school freshman. "She came around with business cards explaining her dog sitting business," Bennett said. "We have used Nathalie ever since and she has been wonderful." Bennett's dog, Jake, "loves her and gets excited every time she comes over or when we see her at Saint Mary's," she added.

Another longtime client said, "When Nathalie stays at our home, we are always confident that our pets are being showered with love and attention, and that, when we return, our house will look better than the way we left it."

Lambrecht begins her senior year at Saint Mary's College this month. The health science major said her dog and house sitting has helped pay her tuition, and she uses those same animal handling skills when running lab tests on rats. Eventually, she hopes to earn a medical or doctoral degree in a research field.

When asked how her clients would feel if she moved away, she said some have insisted "you can't ever leave!"

Although she admits it will be a readjustment for those dog owning neighbors, she hopes to see a couple middle school students take her place. "It's kind of time [for me] to get out of here," she said.

Rudolph, Oliver, Scout, Jake, Snowball, Amberite, Koa and Summer might beg to disagree.

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