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Lamorinda Businesses are Pet Friendly

By Sophie Braccini



Ronda Mahoney (left) and her dog, Sparky, are assisted by sales associate Shannon McDaniel at Specialtees Boutique in Lafayette. Photo Sophie Braccini

car. "I told her she could bring it in," she said. The huge animal was on a leash and well behaved. When the customer was ready to try on some clothes, she and her dog were offered the largest dressing room.

McDaniel says that lots of little dogs come to the store, like Ronda Mahoney's Sparky whose name is added to that of his mistress when the store sends out special invitations. "He is always very good when we come here," says Mahoney, "he just follows me everywhere."

Some businesses, like Clocks Etc., dole out dog treats. Others are so welcoming that sometimes dogs don't want to leave. "I took a lady from the airport back to Orinda with her Yorkshire," recalls Taxi Bleu owner Joseph Teman, "but when we reached our destination, the dog didn't want to get out of the car!"

Nitro Dog in Lafayette is certainly dog friendly, but the bowl of water in front of the store, that once refreshed thirsty dogs, now stands empty. "We have been advised that communal water can spread some types of diseases," says the store manager. "People can come inside and we'll give their pet fresh water."

Some businesses allow dogs with certain restrictions. "We allow dogs only in our lobby area," says Massage Envy co-owner Laura Lott. "This is the rule confirmed by the Board of Barbering and Cosmetology. Service dogs are allowed in the treatment area as long as they do not present a hazard to the person providing the service."

But don't bring your dog to the grocery store or farmers' market. "Dogs are not allowed in food stores," says Open Sesame owner Sue Jun. "It is the Health Department regulation and if I see someone coming in with a dog, even a small one that they carry, I have to ask them to leave it outside."

Jocelyn Habal, assistant director of environmental health for Contra Costa County, confirms that pets are not allowed in food facilities. In fact currently they are not even allowed on outdoor restaurant patios, although the practice is fairly widespread. That may soon change - Assembly Bill 1965, which would give restaurant owners the ability to legally allow dogs in outdoor dining areas, received almost unanimous support from the Assembly in May and awaits approval by the Senate.

Lamorindans who own and shop with their dogs, and other pets, are welcome by many in the Lamorinda business community. There are regulations, of course - food and live animals don't mix, with the exception of service animals. When in doubt, ask before bringing your pet inside. Following simple rules of respect and courtesy will allow everyone to enjoy a summer shopping experience that includes those faithful furry companions.

"Nowadays we have to allow dogs in stores," said Specialtees Boutique buyer Ann Rubin. "To some people the family dog is more than just a pet; it is just like a kid and owners would find it unacceptable to leave it outside."

Rubin's colleague, Shannon McDaniel, is a fervent advocate for dogs in the Lafayette apparel and accessories store. "Many of our best clients come here with their dogs. Over all our years of operation, we've never had a problem." McDaniel once noticed a customer leave her mastiff in the

Tom Chea, owner of Papillon Quality Gourmet, relates the story of a little dog that he didn't spot when the owner entered carrying it. Unfortunately someone inadvertently stepped on its tail and the dog reacted violently. "I am extra cautious now and ask people (with pets) to go on the terrace to have their drinks." Other local establishments have a similar policy. The Cooperage allows pets on the patio, and gives them water, if they are leashed. At Terzetto Cuisine in Moraga, Roos Pal agrees that dogs have to be outside, unless they are service dogs.

"Service dogs can go anywhere a human can go," says Moraga resident Rich Laufenberg, who is a breeder custodian for Guide Dogs for the Blind in San Raphael. Service animals are defined by the US Department of Justice as any animal individually trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability. The only reason a business owner could refuse a service animal would be if it presented a threat to other patrons or disrupted the normal functioning of the business, such as a dog barking in a theater.

"The keys to insuring a pleasant experience for everyone are responsible pet owners who keep their animal under control, and for us to stay attentive to the needs of all of our patrons, making sure they are comfortable in the store whether they like pets or not," concludes McDaniel.

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Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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