

# Sit, stay: homes-away-from-home for pets

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Colleen Prouty, North Main Pet Lodge owner, plays with Sophie the poodle and Jolie the lab at her facility's indoor play area. Photos Cathy Dausman



Dog lodgings have both an inside and an outside area, making “potty breaks self-regulated and easier and less stressful” on the pet, Colleen says. A swamp heater regulates the building temperature that allows doors to be open. The floors have radiant heating. Outside runs are shade-covered and misted when the temperatures climb, and there is an additional inside play area.

By intention the Proutys keep their canine play groups small, just two to five dogs. Prouty says she and Chris put their staff through a canine body language course so they can head off trouble before it starts. They also play specialized music to calm the dogs down.

Cats, too have a “pretty big” lodging space. Prouty’s mother-in-law designed its seven-foot-high ceilings to make changing litter boxes “a stand-up job.” Pet Lodge has 87 separate runs for dogs and 17 for cats, but Prouty says they intentionally book under capacity. A caretaker (the Prouty’s son) lives on the premises, and a pet grooming site (Four Paws Grooming) is immediately adjacent.

**Waiterock Pet Ranch** on Lafayette’s north side has been in business since 1942; Candace Harper has owned it for 30 years. Their canine capacity is more than 100, but Harper doesn’t like to fill it up, and she doesn’t take new clients over the holidays. Waiterock has a cattery too, but Harper’s business is “98 per cent dogs.”

“It’s a wonderful job,” Harper says, “but you have to love dogs and read their language.” She is animal first-aid trained and claims to know “every vet in two counties.” She is also well prepared for any emergency, stocking a month of supplies.

Waiterock opened its doors to over 300 dogs displaced by the 1991 Oakland Hills Firestorm and kept them at no charge (some for five months) until they were reunited with their owners.

Harper cautions dog owners to be thorough in their research before employing anyone as a pet checker or pet sitter, citing comments she’s heard from customers the last 30 years. “Pets suffer emotional stress when their owners leave whether they’re at home or in a boarding facility,” she says. “It’s how those providing care respond that makes the difference.

“Be an advocate for your dog,” Harper says, “and tour, tour, tour.”

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