

# A DOG'S LIFE



**DOG DAYS  
OF SUMMER**  
LAST OF A SERIES

## Pets considered part of the family

BY MAUREEN JENKINS  
Staff Reporter

For many people with canine companions, "dog" is almost a dirty word. After all, that furry creature walking around on four legs with a jangly collar around his neck is a "person with fur."

Some might think it's strange, but for increasingly large numbers of owners, "pet people" are just that. The "parents" pay for day care and play groups while they're away at work — not to mention hundreds of millions of dollars in pet insurance each year. They tote their pets along on vacation, bypassing hotels and activities that don't welcome their furry children.

And as they would for human kids, these folks sign their pets up for physical activities, including "doga" and freestyle dancing, that get their paws up and moving. Just as in any relationship, it's about spending quality time together — and that leads to stronger bonds between pets and their people.

"A lot of people have opted not to have children and choose to have pets — especially here in the city," says Nadine Walmsley of the Anti-Cruelty Society. "They say, 'We're not having children, so these are our children.'"

Because many residents in pet-friendly communities are single or empty-nesters without human kids, they've got time to lavish on their pets. For some, canine freestyle dancing is the latest craze. A sport of sorts rooted in the United Kingdom and Canada, it has taken off in the United States as dogs and owners choreograph and glide through routines thanks to hand signals and spoken commands. "The dogs love it because they're social animals," says Patie Ventre, World Canine Freestyle Organization founder. "There are no professional handlers; they're all dog and owner."

These freestyle dancers kick up their heels — and paws — to Broadway show tunes and songs from Shania Twain and Frank Sinatra, with dog partners weaving in and out of their costumed owners' legs, trotting backward and rolling over on command, and prancing around on their hind legs. Some even take part in competitions. In the Chicago area, dog enthusiast Cindy Morettin — a "freestyler" for the past four years — is helping launch a group for folks who share her excitement.



Bark Chicago clients watch Asha Loska to make sure that ball doesn't get away. —JEAN LACHAT/SUN-TIMES



Cindy Morettin freestyles with her 8-year-old Golden Retriever, Clark Kent. —RICH HEIN/SUN-TIMES

"It is just the niftiest thing," says Morettin of west suburban Sugar Grove, whose canine dance partners include 3-year-old Australian Shepherd Mia-dog and 8-year-old Golden Retriever Clark Kent, "to think you're doing this as a team. They love it because it's really positive. You train them with treats and a lot of praise — and they really get into the music."

Those longing for slower-paced stimulation have been showing up all summer for "Ruff Yoga," a Saturday morning dog yoga class sponsored by Crunch Fitness, at Jonquil Park, 1023 W. Wrightwood. Starting at 8:30 a.m., pets and people spend an hour on "partner poses." About half the stances are familiar ("downward-facing dog," anyone?), but it's about more than setting one's chakras in order.

Chicago's northern, northwestern and western suburbs. A \$200 donation is requested. Each prospective owner must follow the agency's adoption policies and complete an application. Call (847) 604-3254.

## Massage, bath and cologne at Pooch

BY WILLINE VALENTIN  
Staff Reporter

Pooch Chicago at 2307 W. Belmont is one of a growing number of area day care facilities where a dog can frolic with his peers or just relax and put his paws up. Dogs at Pooch Chicago can even enjoy a spa experience. Hey, dogs get stressed out, too!

"We really pride ourselves on doing the best we can to take care of these dogs," said Pooch Chicago owner Robin Kelley.

After a day of play, Sammy, a local dog, began his grooming regimen preceding pickup. He received a massage, an aromatherapy bath and a shampoo followed by a conditioning treatment. During his conditioning time he received a "paw-dicure" consisting of a trim of his nails and the hair between the pads of

"Mostly it's a cool way to get people together with their dogs," says regional group fitness director Lois Miller. "We've had everything from little Yorkie terriers to Great Danes." (Saturday is the last class.)

For sure, some Windy City areas are more dog-obsessed than others. A 2004 Chicago Sun-Times analysis of rabies registration data found that yuppie-friendly ZIP code 60657 — the North Side's Lake View 'hood — has the most dogs per square mile. Other areas, like the South Loop's 60605, are well known as wel-



A mouth spritz begins Sammy's bath at Pooch. —JIM FROST/SUN-TIMES

coming spots where even Ace Hardware and Chicago Community Bank allow pets inside. "It's a combination of lots of dog-friendly buildings and the fact we have sidewalks and trees nearby," says Gail Merritt, South Loop Dog P.A.C. president. Her group raised \$75,000 to build the "Grant Bark Park" dog park, and works with area condo associations to help people and pets co-exist.

"Even people who don't have dogs seem to be pretty friendly to dogs," she says. "It's a way for the community to connect."

Several organizations working to rescue and provide shelter for affected animals:

- The International Fund for Animal Welfare: [www.ifaw.org](http://www.ifaw.org) and at (800) 932-4329.
- The Sacramento, Calif.-based

United Animal Nations Emergency Animal Rescue Service: [www.uan.org](http://www.uan.org) and at (916) 429-2457.

- PETS-MART Charities: [www.petsmartcharities.org](http://www.petsmartcharities.org) or inside all PETS-MART stores through Sept. 30; (800) 423-7387.

## Bark day care offers spa luxury and lots of play

BY VINCE DIXON  
Staff Reporter

It's 10 a.m. and puggle siblings Gracie and Gus trot from the back gates of the Bark Chicago dog day-care facility to the play area where Bark owner Jennifer Schillings stands guard. The two puggles are followed by Max the English mastiff, Wrigley the labradoodle, Kyan the husky and the dozen or so others that pile from the company's drop-off van.

It's only the beginning of a long day for Schillings and her 10 employees, who take turns patrolling the 55,000-square feet of outdoor play space.

"Sometimes it's stressful because you want to make sure that every dog is safe and that every dog is happy," Schillings says.

By noon, the Bark property is packed with more than 45 dogs of various breeds and sizes. Most of the excited canines tire themselves out as they frolic and chase one another outdoors; indoors, smaller dogs scurry about the floor of the climate-controlled building.

According to Bark employee Lucky Atansov, the dogs are often separated by size to prevent fighting or accidents. Atansov transports the dogs from homes to day care and helps divide them into separate play areas.

At 1 p.m., lunches — prepared, packed and labeled by the dogs' owners the night before — are opened and served. The pets munch until full and quickly head back to the cool kiddie pools, sliding boards, shady tents and tennis balls.

Small cots and beds are set out for the pets around 3 p.m. The dogs take a short break from a long day of barking and exercise until parents arrive at 5 p.m. (Overnight boarding also is available at Bark.)

Schilling says the company is run almost like a children's day care center and that the pets often behave like human youngsters, forming special cliques and competing for employees' attention. Misbehavior can sometimes result in "timeouts" and poor grades on the doggie report cards owners receive.

Bark Chicago is at 2450 N. Western; for more information, call (773) 486-BARK. Prices range from \$28 to \$40.

## ADOPTION OPTIONS

Not a city slicker? The nonprofit Midwest Labrador Retriever Rescue in Lombard offers rescued Labs for adoption to qualified families in

## DID YOU KNOW...

Animal lovers worried about the fate of household pets in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama in the wake of Hurricane Katrina can donate to

several organizations working to rescue and provide shelter for affected animals:

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