

BAYONNE community news

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A home of their own?

*Dogtopia opens in Bayonne
— first in the state*

By Al Sullivan
Reporter staff writer

At first glance, Dogtopia on Avenue E near 19th Street resembles a daycare center for pre-kindergarten kids, a place that provides play areas, sleep space for naps, and a kitchen for lunches and snacks.

But it's actually a playground for dogs.

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— Donna Tomczak

Providing daycare for dogs is not a new concept. Dogtopia is a national franchise. It is new to New Jersey, and the Bayonne facility is the first in the state.

While the facility might be new, Elise Tomczak and Donna Ostrowski, co-owners of the facility, are not new to Hudson County or Bayonne. They have run Happy Hounds and Cozy Critters for years in Bayonne and Jersey City, a pet care service that caters to people who cannot always be home to take their pets for a walk or provide other services.

And they say they will expand service in the new facility, and allow dog owners to board their animals. The two Bayonne women will have the first Dogtopia in the nation to provide the additional service, becoming a model for other facilities.

"We will be nothing like a traditional kennel," Tomczak said. "There is no chain link fencing; dogs will not be crated all day long either. Dogtopia has a unique way of caring for dogs. They play and socialize all day long in supervised open play groups."

Although Tomczak and Ostrowski have at times housed dogs in their home, they said they do not have the room to handle that kind of operation, and the new facility allows them to offer the service to a greater number of people and pets.

Over the years, people asked about providing the service, so they are aware of the need.

Calling customers from everywhere

The range of their services in the past covered a large part of lower Hudson County, including all of Bayonne and Jersey City. At one time, they offered a dog walking service in Hoboken, but parking was such a problem they declined those clients.

The new facility, however, will offer drop off service to almost anyone from anywhere, and the two women already have potential clients outside the regular service area.

Customers can drop off their dogs for a day or for extended periods, an especially helpful service for people who are taking vacations. With the Internet webcam, these customers can even view their pets mornings and afternoons via computer access.

Generally the hours of operation are from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. six days a week, although dogs housed for longer durations are fed, walked, and bathed at the facility.

"People can drop off their dogs and we will make sure they get walked and fed," Ostrowski said.

This dream has taken several years longer than the owners had imagined, and is a work in progress. The facility will first have an open space of about 5,000 square feet on the first floor this month and later as they expand to the second floor they'll add 2,500 square feet more.

A screen showing the webcam glows in the lobby, although the only dogs in the facility are



A DOG'S LIFE – Love is one of the key ingredients in the new Dogtopia center in Bayonne.



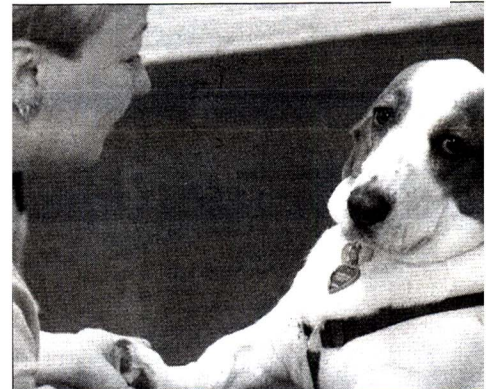
NOT SO NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK – Elise Tomczak and Donna Ostrowski have provided animal care for years. They now have a building and a franchise.

in the small dog section. At first they huddle together in a corner, but lured by the promise of treats, they come out to greet the tour.

Boarding services will require that the dog pass a health evaluation and be able to get along with other dogs.

"Every dog is evaluated and placed in appropriate play groups based on temperament, size, and activity level," Tomczak said. "All dogs must be spayed/neutered, and up to date on all required vaccinations. We are a member of the Hudson County Chamber of Commerce. Our newly renovated facility will include a state of the art HVAC system for the health and comfort of our doggy clients. Our playroom flooring is a special rubber material that helps prevent injury to the dogs, helps in noise reduction, and is also easily cleaned and sanitized. Staff is certified in pet first aid/CPR, as well as trained in dog behavior and pack management."

The facility is required to follow a strict franchise cleaning and sanitizing agreement. In addition to daycare and boarding, other services will include spa services for baths and nails, self serve



doggy washing, doggy birthday parties, training classes, retail/boutique, specific breed meet ups, and fun events like "yappy hour."

"Our fees are all-inclusive, no extra charges for medication, food, or love," said Tomczak. "All dogs regardless of size or care requirements are the same price for daycare and boarding."

Tomczak said the facility will be working with Dogtopia's for K-9 Support for police and military dogs at home and abroad.

"We will participate in Dogtopia's annual charity dog wash, where proceeds raised from bath and spa services will be donated to K-9 Support, or to other local service dog agencies, such as police or rescue dog units," Ostrowski said. "We also plan to be involved with the various local not for profit animal welfare groups, specific breed rescue groups, and shelters. We will hold adoption days and other fundraising events at our facility, and participate in charitable events held throughout the community."

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