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Dogtopia employee Kiersten McDonald tries to avoid Duke's after-bath shake as she rinses him after a soapy bath. Dogtopia, a dog daycare and spa, held a benefit for police K-9 units Saturday.

PHOTOS BY CHUCK LIDDY - cliddy@newsobserver.com

Dogs putting on the ritz

BY ANDREW KENNEY
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CARY – Dozens of people and canines had their first experience with high-end hound care this weekend as local businesses hosted an annual charitable dog wash.

The event, hosted by the Dogtopia spas in Raleigh and Cary, raised money for local police K-9 units – and

showcased an increasingly popular canine lifestyle.

Dogtopia, like its dozen-plus local competitors, offers daytime care and grooming for dogs. But unlike kennels of old, the company in its advertising plays up a childcare-like experience for hounds with busy owners.

At the store's Cary franchise on Saturday, dogs waited for professional portraits and baths.

Duke, a shepherd-Husky mix, stood serenely – or perhaps he was just bewildered – in a high-walled white tub as an employee scrubbed and rinsed him.

"This is high society for him," said Christy Fitzgerald, the dog's owner and a first-time Dogtopia visitor. It's usually outdoor wash downs for the recently adopted dog. "We've never been able to get him in a tub before" said Fitzgerald, a Cary resident.

"We have our techniques," came the English-accented explanation from Cary Dogtopia co-owner Kirsty Radley, who was soaping a Shih Tzu named Hannah in the next tub over. Calm confidence and a helpful push work, she added.

Radley and her business partner, Diane Heath, moved



Kirsty Radley, a co-owner of Dogtopia, gets a lick from Gus, a Boston terrier, as she gets ready to give him a bath. Regular customers pay up to \$30 a day.

last year from London to take advantage of the thriving boutique dog-care market in the United States, she said. Dogtopia's corporate website claims that by 2012 the chain will add more than 20 locations to its current stable of about 25.

"American people definitely seem more crazy about dogs," Radley said as she

swaddled the Shih Tzu. "It's getting that way in the UK – but they're not yet substitutes for children."

Many of the Cary location's 350 regulars pay up to \$30 per day, sometimes five days a week, to leave their pups at the facility, which has room for 82 hounds. Dogs there spend much of the day in an open space socializing with

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their peers.

The Cary location hosts about 30 dogs a day.

Brenna McCarthy has found similarly high demand for her new Raleigh business, Trusted Loving Care by Brenna. She and her 14-year-old daughter found enough clients in their first year of business to keep them afloat, including three daycare dogs and one that stays from Monday straight through to Friday.

"That you could support your family on doggy daycare and boarding, I just didn't think it was possible," she said.

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