

# THE MORNING NEWS

LOCAL NEWS FOR NORTHWEST ARKANSAS

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## Pet Pampering Going to the Dogs

By Kim Souza  
THE MORNING NEWS

When Chaddie Kumpe Platt was a child the only dream she had was to own a dog farm.

"I envisioned two dogs of every breed on my farm, much like Noah's Ark, except all the animals were dogs," Platt said.

It took more than three decades, but in the fall of 2005 Platt walked away from a career in finance and joined her mother, Priscilla Kumpe, who was retiring from a 38-year teaching career, to open Dog Party USA in Tontitown.

Dog Party USA is a "full-service" doggie daycare and pet boarding facility located on Highway 112 just south of Springdale.

Full-service means morning taxi pick-ups for dog owners who don't have the time to drop off the animal, as well as six full hours of interactive doggie play groups, nap time and yappie hour snack time just before the animals are picked up each evening. The standard daily fee for daycare is \$15 and drop-ins are accepted.

The business has grown from two to 14 staff members with a full-time dog groomer in the 18 months it's been open.

"Dogs are such social animals that they really have a good time here in the various play groups interacting with other dogs," Platt said.

On any given day, Platt and Kumpe will watch between 25 to 30 dogs who are regular customers. From Barron Ronald Kreitlow, a 9-year-old Great Dane, to tiny Kodi Motley, a 1-year-old Yorkshire terrier, each dog is assigned to interactive play groups based on personality traits and size.

Believe it or not, Barron and Kodi are playmates.

The company also offers boarding services averaging anywhere from 25 dogs to as many as 85 dogs on any given weekend. Dogs who are staying over get a doggie mint on their pillow each night and are entertained to classical music under dimmed lights in the climate-controlled kennel.

Kumpe once boarded a Kapucha monkey for the weekend at her home, diapers and all.

### PETCARE BOOM

Dog Party USA is part of the fast growing -- \$40 billion a year -- national pet care industry.

The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association's annual report said the industry has mushroomed in recent years. In 2007, Americans are expected to spend a record \$40.8 billion on their pets. Total pet spending in 2006 was \$38.5 billion, an 83 percent increase from what Americans spent a decade ago.

Pet pampering has become one of the most powerful consumer trends to sweep the nation, from \$18,000 Ralph Lauren pet carriers to home-baked gourmet pet treats. The industry continues to see an average growth of 10 percent annually, **Jim D'Aquila** of the **Mercanti Group**, wrote in an industry report earlier this year.

"In today's busy society, convenience drives much of the innovation emerging with most of these rapidly budding services making owning a pet easier," said Bob Vetere, president of APPMA.

According to the 2007-2008 National Pet Owners Survey conducted by APPMA, 63 percent of U.S. households own a pet, or 71.1 million homes. Roughly 45 percent of U.S households own at least one dog, compared to 38.4 percent who own cats.

The annual survey found that dog owners spent in 2006 an average of \$1,425 per dog for veterinarian visits, food, boarding, grooming, vitamins, treats and toys last year.

## NO SLOWDOWN

While average consumer spending may be hurt by higher fuel prices, some industry watchers predict good times for the pet sector.

Retailers targeting children and pets may be better insulated from a potential slowdown in consumer spending, according to a semi-annual report recently released by Standard & Poor's Equity Research Services of New York.

According to the survey, working adults who view pets as full-fledged family members -- equal to humans -- will continue to pamper them despite higher interest rates, gas prices and the dampening effect of a declining housing market, said Michael Souers, a specialty retail analyst for Standard and Poors.

Souers said retail companies catering to pet pampering services could be better positioned to weather a slowdown in consumer spending.

As the pet population continues to grow, Vetere predicts further strength in this industry. With baby boomers and young professionals turning to pet ownership in record numbers, the outlook is strong for the next three to five years, the expert said.

"Viewing the pet as a family member continues to drive the development of new companies offering both products and services catering to pets," D'Aquila said.

## PET SPECIALTY SERVICES

The Lowell Veterinary Center believes in the AARP -- Aging Animals Require Protection.

Dr. Viki Cyphers has worked in animal health more than 20 years. Cyphers is also a doggie dentist at the Lowell clinic.

She performs routine cleanings, root canals, caps and fillings for dogs of all sizes. She also has put on doggie braces for working police dogs. Cyphers said ignoring the condition of a pet's mouth can lead to periodontal disease, tooth loss and other serious health problems such as heart, liver and kidney failure.

Aside from the dental business, Cypers also specializes in senior pet health. She recommends an annual senior wellness exam for aging dogs. Larger breeds age faster than smaller varieties.

At 51 pounds a 6-year-old dog is considered a senior. A 20-pound dog becomes a senior citizen at 9 years old, according to Cypher's aging chart.

Pets are living longer in part because of the care owners are providing.

"I am seeing pets more and more substituted for children among young couples and older people. Pets give unconditional love, and owners are spending more to care for the pets they have," Cyphers said.

## GOURMET PET TREATS

From fresh-baked breath mints to biscotti, Northwest Arkansas dog owners can choose from a wide selection of gourmet dog treats at the local Big Wag Gourmet Dog Bakery in Rogers. Owners Cary and Erin Hague will celebrate the company's one year anniversary in July.

Brothers Cary and Toby Hague spent almost two years brainstorming the store's concept. The partners sunk more than \$30,000 of personal savings to finance the venture after being turned down for a Small Business Administration Loan.

Both brothers continue to work full-time jobs outside the store in the software business.

The company's business plan was modeled after a relative who owns a similar store in Illinois. While the brothers don't expect to turn a profit on the investment for at least two years, Cary Hague said the store is able to cover its monthly operating expenses.

All of the store's fresh items are baked onsite by Erin, who uses "fit for human consumption" ingredients.

One popular item at the store is "Barkday cakes." The cakes are baked using eggs, peanut flour, molasses, whey and carob powder. No preservatives, salt or sugar are added. The cakes are decorated with colorful frostings made from carob instead of chocolate and peanut flour -- which adds peanut flavor and protein -- or mashed potatoes.

The mashed potatoes can be mixed with food color gels to create colorful accent frostings.

While the brightly colored cupcakes on display look like a sugary confection, all have far less sugar than what is used for human consumption and none of the ingredients contain caffeine, Erin Hague said.

The company's sales are growing by an average of 25 percent each month, Cary Hague said.

After the recent pet food scare that involved some of the nation's largest pet food manufacturers, the Hagues said the company began offering an all-natural domestically packaged food.

What started out as a hobby for Cary has now become a niche business and part of a fast-growing business sector. The Hagues said they are glad to be in on the ground floor of this kind of niche business in a dynamic region such as Northwest Arkansas.

"We thought long and hard before we jumped into this business and though the first year involves a steep learning curve, we are quite pleased with the prospects," Cary Hague said.

By The Numbers:

\$40 billion: Value of U.S. pet care industry

\$1,425: Average annual expense for a dog owner, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturing Association

\$18,000: Price of a Ralph Lauren dog carrier

Webwatch:

[www.dogpartyusa.com](http://www.dogpartyusa.com)

[www.dogfriendly.com](http://www.dogfriendly.com)

[www.bigwag.com](http://www.bigwag.com)

[www.petdental.com](http://www.petdental.com)