

day care at dog-ma

Following a nationwide trend, Rebecca Bisgyer has opened the first day care center for dogs on Capitol Hill.

by Mary Masters
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A check of the clock and the guilty feelings begin to seep in. It's time to go to dog park and you-know-who is waiting patiently. What is dog owner to do? One area dog owner has an answer.

Rebecca Bisgyer traded in a 20-year career in corporate marketing to open dog-ma, the first doggy day care center in Washington DC. The former 12-hour-a-day marketing executive traveled constantly, and often felt guilty leaving her two dogs at home alone. This is a new life for Bisgyer and her husband Nick Garnett who has also started his own business. "I am reconnecting with things that give me joy," says Bisgyer as she cuddles a small white pooch who has jumped onto her lap. "The name stands for dog mom," she says. "Capitol Hill is a dog-loving community, with lots of dog parks and dogs, and plenty of owners who work long hours." This was the deciding factor in her decision to locate her new business on the Hill.

Stop by dog-ma and you'll be greeted at the front gate by a fun-loving group of canines in all shapes and sizes. Buggy, a Jack Russell terrier gives a mighty bark from his tiny frame; much like a drill sergeant keeping the troops in line. Rebecca gives a needed pat on the head to Perry, a golden retriever who nudges his nose against her leg. Inside the dog-ma house, a video of "Lady and the Tramp," is playing. The dogs are just doing what dogs love to do -- running, jumping and playing with each other. Everyone seems to be having fun.

Dog-ma is located at 821 Virginia Ave., SE, just a half block for the freeway off 8th Street, SE. The 7000-square foot immaculate facility includes an indoor and outdoor play area with plenty of squeaky, chewy dog toys. There's a nap room complete with large plush pillows to let sleeping dogs lie. Dog-ma accommodates 20 to 30 dogs a day and is open from 8am - 7pm weekdays. Most pet owners drop off their dogs, but pick-up service is also available.

To qualify, each canine client must be at least five months old and "socialized" to deal with people and other dogs. Potential doggie clients must be able to share food and toys with fellow canines and have no history of aggressive behavior. Owners must complete an application review and present proof of required vaccinations. The dog must also be spayed or neutered. The \$20-a-day service consists of a morning obedience class, snacktime, nap time and plenty of play time.

An emphasis is placed on giving the four-legged clients plenty of human attention. Dale Maraugh is in charge of cleanup operations and entertaining the dog guests. He interacts with the dogs by throwing a ball or sharing a needed hug with a none-month old Labrador retriever named Mulligan. "I love dogs, so this is a great job," says Maraugh. His previous career was in human services for disabled adults.

Billie, an eight-year old labrador retriever spends three days a week at dog-ma. "Billie is an extremely social dog. Here, she has plenty of activity which seems to keep her happy," says Billie's owner Don Reisman. Reisman often spends extra hours on the job as head of product planning and development in the publisher's office of the World Bank. Dog-ma gives Reisman the freedom to put in the additional hours without guilt. In fact, on one of the days Billie is in day care, Reisman gives back to the community by teaching English as a second language to students at the Indochinese Community Center.

Future plans are to provide grooming, full boarding services, training sessions and veterinarian care at the Capitol Hill center. "People have such an enormous interest in their pets that the market is booming for specialty pet services. My goal is to use dog-ma as a blueprint for future dog day care centers in the Washington DC area," says Bisgyer.

For more information about dog-ma, call Rebecca Bisgyer at (202) 543-7805.