



Bark of Approval

'PET RESORT' PLAY TIME KEEPS TAILS WAGGING ON DOGS AND THEIR OWNERS

ARTICLE MATT SMITHMIER | PHOTOGRAPHY ANGELA BOND

WALK BY THE DOUBLE GLASS ENTRANCE DOORS OF YAPPY HOUR Pet Resort and you'll hear it. The dogs inside greet every visitor the same way, and they all greet you at once. Deep woofs, shrill yaps, hound dog howls—saying hello the only way they know how: loud but welcoming.

"The dogs get excited to see other dogs and see people coming in," said Curtis Kelly, who owns Yappy Hour along with his wife, Nichole. "And that's just the nature of things. But most people, if they love dogs, they understand."

Offering services like doggy day care, boarding and an on-site bakery, Yappy Hour is serving an ever-growing market of dog lovers in the Northland. The husband and wife had always talked about opening a place like Yappy Hour, so when the Gladstone building opened up in early 2010, they jumped at the opportunity.

Prior to opening Yappy Hour, Nichole worked for a nonprofit, and Curtis sold animal care equipment. Both dog lovers, they had already started selling dog treats at local businesses, including the former tenant of their space, which housed an indoor dog park. Once it closed, Yappy Hour opened two months later in the building that has also been a carpet store and even a movie theater over the years.

From past experience, Curtis and Nichole knew that social interaction with other dogs was crucial, whether your dog was staying through the day or over a long weekend.

"The play time is big for us," Curtis said. "That is kind of the foundation of what we put together here. We don't feel like the dogs should spend their whole entire vacation while their owners are away inside a four-by-six kennel. If you're looking for a suite with a TV in there and Animal Planet running 24 hours a day, there's probably a reason for that. That's probably where your dog spends most of its time."

The layout of Yappy Hour reflects that choice. Once in the front doors, you'll also notice a wide expanse with two giant play areas, more than 11,000 square feet in all. It's more than enough room for running, jumping and playing—especially expending lots and lots of energy.

"Everybody has a good time," Curtis says. "After a stay with or us or even during the day if they come for day care, they usually go home wiped out, tired from playing really hard. It usually takes them a day or two to recover."

With the on-site bakery, dogs staying the night also enjoy a freshly baked dog treat before bedtime. Yappy Hour can accommodate

up to 15 dogs for overnight stays, and the day-care service can take up to 45 dogs per day.

For the humans, Curtis says, the advantage is a budget-friendly alternative for your dog and personal attention from the employees.

"Nichole and I, we're the owners, we're the operators," Curtis says. "We want to build that relationship with the dog as well as their owners. We're not just a corporation with somebody behind the counter who really doesn't want to be there. We take pride in the dogs and the relationships we've built along the way. I think people really like that."

After more than two years of operation, Curtis says the response has been positive, and repeat customers are growing. A quick scan of the Facebook comments on the Yappy Hour page seems to back this up. The page is also an easy way to check up on your furry friend while you're away. Curtis and Nichole post action shots each day of

the dogs getting in that valuable play time.

Another big competitive advantage, Curtis says, is the convenience of dropping off and picking up. Instead of a small window, customers can come by anytime during operating hours.

"So if you're at the lake, you don't have to rush back to pick up your dog by 3 p.m. or else it's boarded for another night," he says.

Plus, he says, no hidden or additional charges if your dog requires medicine, you want to bring in special food, or if you need other special accommodations.

"We try to make it as simple as possible," he says.

Judging by the eager barks and wiggly tails, simple is proving to be the recipe for success. ●

Yappy Hour Pet Resort is located at 6455 N. Prospect Ave. in Gladstone and online at YappyHourOnline.com.

