

[The Columbia Daily Tribune](#)

Tales from a doggy day care

Dogs that play at South Paw Acres get plenty of attention and go home tired.



Photo by [Nick King](#)

Faye Nowell greets Buddy, left, and Molly after getting a client's food from The Dog House at South Paw Acres, a Boone County doggy day care and boarding facility.

By [Sara Semelka](#)

[Saturday, February 21, 2009](#)

Every Wednesday, Jennifer Roberts readies 8-year-old Truman for his weekly play date at a local day care.



Photo by [Nick King](#)

Faye Nowell, left, talks with Joanne Fulton, center, and Jerry Barrier as they take their dog, Malka, at right, for a tour of South Paw Acres during a new-dog interview. Jerry and Joanne plan to take Malka to the facility. The two already take two of their dogs there.

The play dates give Roberts a break and give Truman a chance to release energy, play outside with his friends, and nap and watch TV when he's tuckered out.

Unlike most day care youngsters, however, Truman has four legs ... and a fluffy tail.

Roberts, who works from home as a photographer, said she wants her 50-pound Brittany spaniel to socialize with other dogs, and she believes it's unfair to leave dogs home alone all day.

"Dogs are pack animals, and they don't like to be alone," she said. "They go nutty and destroy your house. Everyone who says, 'I have a bad dog,' I think it's that they're not paying it enough attention."

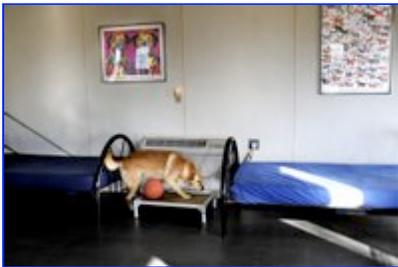


Photo by [Nick King](#)

Buddy checks things out inside the Dog House at South Paw Acres. The Dog House has beds, a television, kennels and artwork for the dogs that are boarded there.

Roberts said when she tells Truman it's time for "doggy camp" at Faye Nowell's South Paw Acres, he can't wait to jump into the car.

"He does little circles, and he's so excited," she said. "He whines in the car, and he knows all the turns. When we get to the driveway, he howls in the car. This is his thing. He's known Faye for 7½ years."



Nowell said she has been a dog lover her entire life, and, after working about 13 years as a recreational therapist, she now runs a doggy day care and off-leash boarding facility just outside Columbia.

South Paw Acres sits on about an acre of land, complete with a small pond, a spacious yard and double garage-size doghouse outfitted with beds, chairs and a TV tuned to Animal Planet.

Nowell said she has always had a dog or two living with her, and back in the late 1980s, she saw an advertisement on a bulletin board at Wal-Mart. "It said, 'Wanted: day care for dog,'" Nowell recalled. The ad was placed by a hairdresser who drove into town three days a week from Lake of the Ozarks and wanted someone to look after her dog.

"I took the job, and it got me thinking, 'This is not hard to do, I enjoy it, and it's fun for the little dog,'" Nowell said.

She started doing research and found that doggie day cares were popular on the East and West coasts for people who worked long hours. At the time, Nowell was working for her father's business, Nowell's Foods, doing advertising. When her father died in 2000 and left her some money, Nowell decided to try her hand at opening a doggy day care.

She knew she needed a property where the dogs could play outside, and it needed to be in the county because the city limits a household to four dogs. After a couple of months of searching, Nowell said she found an ideal location just west of the city. She needed a conditional use permit and said it took some persuasion to convince neighbors and county officials that her business would be a benefit to the community.



Photo by [Nick King](#)

Buddy, left, and Molly race around the pond at South Paw Acres, a doggy day care and boarding facility owned by Faye Nowell.

When she opened in August 2001, Nowell said, she had one complaint but hasn't had any problems in the years since. Before opening, Nowell said she had to "dogify" the property, including converting the double garage into a doghouse. She insulated the building, lined the walls with Fiberglass-reinforced plastic, added windows, a rubber floor, a doggy bath sink and mini kitchen.

To make the building more homey, she also equipped the space with several kennel cages and metal-frame beds with mattresses and worn blankets for the dogs to lounge on. There is a television and a radio for the dogs to listen to, and a camera wired to a computer in Nowell's office, which is

attached to her home, also on the property.



As word of South Paw Acres spread and dogs starting arriving for day care and boarding, Nowell said she had to learn by the seat of her pants.

At first, she had her entire yard open to the dogs.

“I made fencing for the dogs, but the yard came up to my own house,” she said. “That worked for a while, ... but it all went to dust pretty quickly.”

Nowell has since fenced off a yard for herself, and the rest of the space is covered is grass, straw and paths of stepping stones so the dogs can have free rein. She also has created separate areas for small and large dogs.

Clients can either drop off pets for daytime play or board them while taking trips out of town. No matter how long a dog stays, Nowell said, they get care and attention from her throughout the day.

“When I first started the business, I was thinking I needed to have planned activities,” she said, adding that her training as a recreational therapist taught her about structured play. “It turned out pretty quickly that that wasn’t the case. They just want to play with each other and hang out.”

Nowell said dogs love the opportunity to meet and play with other dogs.

“Here, they are not trying to be human in a human world,” Nowell said. “This is a stress reliever for them. They get to go back to their instincts. They learn cues only a dog can teach and how to socialize.”

Though the canines mostly entertain each other, Nowell said, she plays ball with them, gives them treats and watches to make sure no one is nipping or snapping at the others. If a dog needs a little encouragement to eat, Nowell said she has no problem sitting down and hand-feeding the pup.

“If someone does better if they have a tummy rub or back rub, I’ll do that,” she said. “They will get pampered with special care.”



Before a dog is admitted to South Paw Acres, there is an application process. Most of Nowell’s clients come from word-of-mouth referrals or materials she leaves at pet-supply stores.

Nowell directs potential clients to her Web site, southpawacres.com, where they can download paperwork. They also must provide proof that the dog is up-to-date on vaccinations.

“Hopefully, they will come in with their documents and their dogs,” Nowell said. “I’ll meet them in the office ... walk through the yards ... give a tour of the dog house, and they can decide if that’s how they want their dog boarded.”

The visit also is a chance for Nowell to observe the dog's temperament. "I see how the new dog does, if it's scared, if it's salivating with stress," she said. "I give it a biscuit, see if he nips or snaps at it."

The screening process is one of the reasons Jennifer Thurston chose South Paw Acres for her boarding and day care provider. "I don't want to put my dog with another aggressive dog," said Thurston, who brings her beagle mix, Molly, to South Paw Acres once a week.

Both Thurston and Roberts said they like the off-leash freedom the dogs have at South Paw Acres.

"I could not see bringing him to my vet to be held in a box for days," Roberts said. "That's what boarding is, you're in a box. ... You get back a crazy version of your dog — a dog that has anxiety and pent-up energy. You're tired from your trip, but the dog's like, 'Play with me!' When you get your dog back from Faye's, he sleeps for three days."



The model of a kennel-free boarding and doggy day care business is catching on in the Midwest, Nowell said, and her friend, Nancy Bass, has opened a similar facility on 10 acres near the Columbia Regional Airport.

Bass said she helped out at South Paw Acres for about six weeks when Nowell was ill for a time, and Nowell encouraged her to start her own business. Bass' business, The Crate Escape, is not in competition with South Paw Acres, Bass said, and she and Nowell remain good friends. When Bass came before the county commission for a conditional use permit, Nowell vouched for her.

Before her own business was open, Bass said she took her own dog to South Paw Acres.

"I saw what it did for my dog, a yellow Lab," Bass said. "He turned into a good dog. It worked with him, helped him a lot and calmed him down. It gives them a chance to get their ya-yas out so you can live with them."

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