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Pampered Pooches

By Chris Jackett
STAFF WRITER

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It seemed only natural for animal lovers Kirk and Laurel Nicola to open their own Novi pet spa and resort.

The pet care industry is growing in every way imaginable.

More people own pets than ever before, resulting in more spending and a new level of pet care.

Nearly 71.1 million (63 percent) U.S. homes contain pets, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers

Association.

Humble beginnings

"It started with us boarding our pet, Scooter (an 8-year-old bichon-frise). We had a nice place but not a good experience," said Laurel, an interior designer and co-owner of Paw Print Inn. "I had talked with my husband about starting our own business and we decided this was something we wanted to pursue."

After two years of research and four months of interior design, Paw Print Inn opened last month in Vincenti Industrial Park, off Meadowbrook Road near 11 Mile Road.

"It's a state-of-the-art facility," Laurel said. "We've taken ideas from other facilities and put them all into one."

"We treat all our guests like our own pets. If there's a guest that needs extra attention or play time, we'll give that to them free of charge to the owner."

Kirk, a mechanical engineer, said their boarding facility is the first kennel in Novi and includes all of the amenities he and his wife think a pet should have.

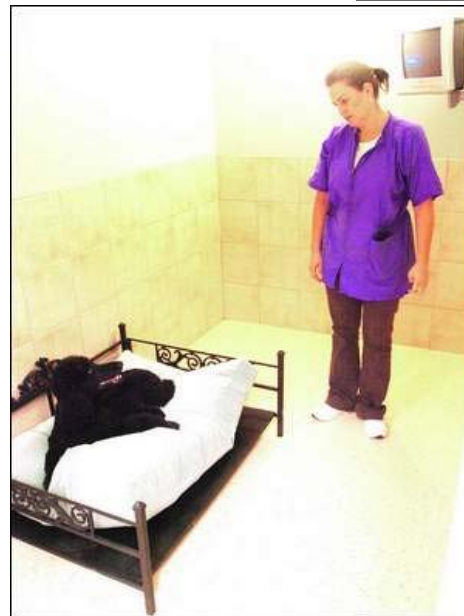


Photo by JOHN HEIDER/Novi News

Kristen Hayden, a worker at Novi's Paw Print Inn, monitors "Morgan" in one of their facilities' Signature Suites.

Celebrity pooches

Laurel Nicola, an interior designer and co-owner of the Paw Print Inn in Novi, noted hotel heiress Paris Hilton as one of the celebrities most prominent in the public eye of pet care.

In 2005, The NY Dog and The Hollywood Dog magazines' readers voted Hilton worst celebrity pet owner for the treatment of her Chihuahua, Tinkerbell, whom she took to many red carpet events. Joss Stone, Ashley Olsen and Tori Spelling were voted best pet owners.

Spelling and rapper Missy Elliott had a pet-related feud with Hilton in 2005, which enflamed the country's thoughts on pet care.

Many people, celebrities or not, seek pets for their "unconditional love" and companionship.

Web sites such as <http://www.pamperedpetscatalog.com> make it easy for all pet owners to pamper their pets to the point of purchasing jewelry, bathrobes and more.

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Top dog

The walls and floors of the Paw Print Inn are specially made to protect each animal's health.

And the front sidewalk, as well as the outdoor play pens, are heated by underground coils, aiming to avoid the use of salt, which damages paw pads in the winter, Kirk said.

The facility features 24- to 72-foot club suites and 36- to 60-foot signature suites, which both have sheepskin blankets and raised bedding for orthopedic benefits.

"We have raised feeders, which is especially good for older pets because it helps them to hold their neck up high as opposed to bending down," Laurel said.

The club suites have protective walls to avoid too much contact between neighboring units, while the signature suites are set behind soundproof walls and glass, and include televisions playing programs on Animal Planet and movies like "Air Bud."

The Inn also offers Web cam surveillance for owners on vacation wanting to check on their pets.

Costs range from \$33-65 a night.

The "cat-ery" condos are 3x3x7 compartments with state-of-the-art ventilation systems costing \$25-30 a night.

"We have a very big facility with a lot of space. It cuts down on stress for owners and pets as well," Laurel said. "(With the 14,400-square-foot space), other (kennels would) board 250 dogs and cram them in. We can take up to 98 dogs and 16 cats in our cat-ery."

Pampered trend

Americans spent \$38.5 billion on pets in 2006, which is estimated to rise to \$40.8 billion this year, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

And according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, rooming and boarding is a \$2.9 billion industry while \$9.9 billion is spent annually on pet supplies and over-the-counter medicine.

Laurel said the reason some people pamper pets is because their children are grown so they carry the care on to their pets.

"There's a definite trend. There's not many pet resorts in Michigan that offer those kind of services. People treat their pets like children," she said.

However, pet care has also gone in a different direction, particularly in the Hollywood scene. It is becoming more common that celebrities are seen with their pets not only in public, but on the red carpet.

"(Some celebrities) use their pets as accessories. I'm sure they love them to death... it's not good or bad," Laurel said.

Paw Print Inn

Phone: (248) 615-8500

Address:

41249 Vincenti Ct.

Internet:

<http://www.pawprintinn.com>

[Zoom Photo](#)



Photo by JOHN HEIDER/Novi News

Laurel Nicola, co-owner of Novi's Paw Print Inn, cuddles with some of her four-footed guests.

[Zoom Photo](#)



Photo by JOHN HEIDER/Novi News

A visitor to Novi's Paw Print Inn takes a sniff and checks out a photographer's camera. Photo by JOHN HEIDER/Novi News A visitor to Novi's Paw Print Inn takes a sniff and checks out a photographer's camera.

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