

Renee's Ultimate Pet Services and Sandy Paws Dog Sitting

Pet Sitting in Your House or Mine: Two Services Offer the Choices

Dog owners have in-home options for care of their pet when they're away. Either the sitter can check on the pets in your house, or the pet can stay in the home of the other, as two established caregivers refer each other as the case fits.

Renee's Ultimate Pet Services, and Sandy Paws Dog Sitting, LLC, provide the different options that compliment each other.

Some dogs and cats are happier in their own home, with day care provided by Renee Kennedy, a Barnegat resident. For other dog owners, it's easier to board them, and Hope Gardiner offers a comfortable environment of TLC in her Brant Beach home.

"We both really enjoy what we're doing, and that enjoyment extends to our clients, who are happy to know they have a person they can trust with their four-legged family members," remarked Gardiner.

Both service owners are certified in pet first aid, among other qualifications.

Outside of their pet businesses, both women are known in the community. Kennedy is outgoing past president of the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce, and Gardiner is administrative director with the Lighthouse International Film Festival. Both are members of the Long Beach Island Chamber of Commerce and the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce.

Dog owners call on pet sitters for many reasons. At this time of year when people want a getaway to Florida or the casinos, or in the summer when they're spending the whole day at the beach, they call upon pet sitters. Others who work long days require someone to check on their pets.

"I have retired couples who want to go to New York, and I'll go to their house and walk the dogs that day. I have clients who are nurses and work 12-hour shifts," said Kennedy, a member of the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters. More and more senior citizens are grateful for assistance as well.

"And I have year-round clientele

who either go away on vacation or they go to shows or weddings. I have people who go away golfing. Their dogs now know my house and the layout," said Gardiner.

The choice of the two services can depend on the pet's temperament, for instance, whether they travel well (some get motion sickness), whether they are anxious if alone in the house, whether they like to associate with other dogs (Gardiner has two dogs of her own), and whether there are too many pets in the family to take them all to a boarder.

"With mine, it's a home atmosphere; the house is cozy and warm," noted Gardiner. "And in Renee's instance, the dog gets to stay home and be comfortable in familiar surroundings."

Explained Kennedy, "I go to their house. I would usually go there between 7 and 9 a.m., I'll go back in the afternoon, and back again anytime between 7 and 9 p.m."

Renee's Ultimate Pet Services

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Photographs by Ryan Morrill

PETS AGREE: (Top) Hope Gardiner's own canine family, Boodles and Bromley, cuddle up by the fire in the home of Sandy Paws Dog Sitting. Visiting with Gardiner is Renee Kennedy, right, whose Renee's Ultimate Pet Services offers the other option, day care in the client's home. Each service has its advantages, depending on the dog.

Pet Sitting

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extends to feeding the cats or other pets in the client's house, along with bringing in the mail, for instance.

"I have clients who go on vacation; they go to Disney World, so they're gone for maybe 10 days," said Kennedy. "And what's nice about that is if they have multiple dogs, I come to their house, I take care of the dogs, I'll water their plants, feed their fish, turn lights on at nighttime. So it's almost like I do a security check. I'll bring mail in for them, do the blinds, make the house look the same as whatever they normally do in the evening — make the house look lived in."

Added Gardiner, "I think there are dogs that feel a lot more comfortable at home ... but in my instance, my house is inviting, and because I have my two dogs, it's like a buddy system."

Her toy poodle, "Boodles," and a vision-impaired rescued dog, Bromley, lounged by the fireplace. Bromley is a therapy dog with Southern Ocean Medical Center's Pet Therapy Program, and with Holy Redeemer Hospice Bereavement Pet Therapy in Southern Ocean County.

"I always say having them here during pet-sitting is more of a 'pro' (than a 'con') because the dogs kind of get distracted by each other. When people leave their dogs here, the dogs don't realize that their owners are away," said Gardiner, who is always home and is able to work out of her home with her part-time computer business.

More about the qualifications of the two business owners: both are avid supporters of animal rescue organizations. Kennedy has four dogs of her own, three German shepherds and a Lab. She has worked as a backup veterinary assistant for My Very Own Vet, and also worked with dog trainers.

Gardiner's Sandy Paws Dog Sitting has been established four years. As a volunteer with the Marine Mammal Stranding Center, she has been called out to assist with stranded dolphin rescue.

To do the work they do involves experience with animal behavior, but also a love of animals. Neither one gets upset if, for instance, a dog has an accident on the rug.

"I started doing this for friends, and it turned into doing it more and more," said Kennedy. "I love animals and I've been around animals my entire life. When I was 4 years old, I wanted to be a dog when I grew up. My mother said, 'Get out from under the table!'"

Gardiner added a similar sentiment. "I've never been raised without a dog. My dad's wedding present to my mother was a black cocker spaniel. I've been wanting to do the dog boarding business since I graduated college, and I finally got my life's wish. I was so miserable on my vacation, being away from my dog ... That's how this got started. I said, 'If I'm going to stay home, I might as well take in everybody else's dog!'"

"People say, 'It must be a fun job.' And it is fun and rewarding, but it's a big responsibility," Kennedy commented. "You also have to know dog behavior, and you have to know different things going on with the dog when they're in your care. One time I knew this dog was not well, and I had to rush it up to Tinton Falls, five o'clock in the morning Christmas night. So it can be very scary, too."

A "meet and greet" is the answer for both women as to getting acquainted with the dogs first, and making sure the arrangement will work out.

"What I also found out is when the dogs come back in the summer, they already know me. Dogs have an unbelievable memory," said Gardiner.

Another great thing about a meet and greet is that owners can drop the dog off for a few hours and when they come back, the dog realizes that they are being picked up; they're not being abandoned," Gardiner observed. "I have had meet and greets for the future, just in case."

Each pet-sitting job is different, as sitting down and talking with the two providers shows. Kennedy has one interesting job that particularly keeps her on her toes.

"I have one client, he's a breeder; he's got at any given time six or seven dogs," related Kennedy. "He does competitions and field trial work, and he'll take one dog and leave the other dogs at home. And I'll go over and take care of the dogs. He keeps the dogs on a raw diet, which is a lot of work. Each one gets a different amount of dripping red meat, plus they all get enzyme tablets. Some of them get the salmon oil, some get yogurt, some of them don't, some get kelp ... So I'm reading off this chart that's on the wall."

For more information, see the web pages of the businesses. Sandypawsdogsitting.com is Gardiner's website. Her phone at East 34th Street in Brant Beach is 609-494-5554.

Kennedy has a Facebook page for Renee's Ultimate Pet Services. The phone is 609-335-3663.

—Maria Scandale

marias scandale@thesandpaper.net