

In this school, the student body has a tail

Canine day-care facility offers quadrupeds chance to exercise, socialize

by **DONNA KENNY KIRWAN**

For The Times

EAST PROVIDENCE — It's a long day for Fido when mom and dad both work. All that boredom can lead to chewed furniture and carpets, as well as unwelcome hyperactivity on the part of the dog when the owners return home.

However, a local animal trainer and behavioral therapist has a solution for working "parents:" canine daycare.

Alexandra Morgan, owner of Alexandra Morgan's Canine Behavioral Center at 330 North Broadway, offers daycare services for dogs Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Full day sessions cost \$16, half-day sessions are \$12, and one-hour "play times" are \$6. She also offers overnight boarding for regular clients.

"My clients who are mostly people who work and who don't want their dogs to be lonely or cooped up in crates all day," Morgan said.

She added that others choose the half-day or hourly

sessions to help their shy canines become better socialized with other people and dogs.

Morgan, who has been training dogs for 30 years, says that since dogs are intensely social creatures by nature, they benefit from being able to run and play with each other in a group setting.

She added that when the owners pick up the dogs at the end of the day, the animals are usually tired out from all that play — something that weary pet owners can appreciate.

"If a dog is alone all day and bored, it has stored up a day's worth of energy.

"Here, the dogs usually go home exhausted, and the owners can enjoy them in a low-key way," she said.

Generally, the dogs are allowed to run free in a supervised indoor ring.

There is a separate area set aside for puppies and small

dogs, and an area for those animals who are elderly, extremely shy, or have some other type of behavioral problem.

Morgan admits that fights do occur, although not nearly as often as one might think thanks to preliminary screenings and constant supervision by her staff. Before accepting a dog, she does an evaluation to see if the animal can be successfully integrated into the daycare.

Some who exhibit problem tendencies, such as shyness or aggressiveness, are allowed in with the addition of behavioral therapy, another Morgan specialty.

Although most dogs engage in "play biting," there is the occasional injury, she said.

However, she said that in 20 months of operation, there were only two injuries that required veterinary medical attention.

After that, the biter is required to wear a muzzle.

“We have a one-bite rule,” she said.

Morgan said the other important factor to keeping the peace is her well-trained crew. “All of my staff are required to have a personal relationship with each dog.

“This means knowing the dog personally — its energy level, likes and dislikes. This is our top measure,” she said.

She adds that with a large group of dogs, there is actually less likelihood of fights occurring than with a small group “because the dogs who don't like each other can avoid each other.”

She compared it to being at a cocktail party, where it is easier to avoid a person you don't like in a large crowd than a small intimate setting.

In addition to the dog daycare, Morgan is an experienced canine behavioral therapist.

She offers daytime and evening obedience classes for puppies to specialized classes for dogs of all ages with behavioral problems.

Always an animal lover, Morgan said she began training the dogs of her neighbors while just a child living on Providence's East Side.

As a student at Brown University, she took numerous psychology and animal science courses.

Morgan eventually developed her own style of obedience training, based on using food as a reward for positive behavior.

Morgan, who is also Vice President of the Northwest Animal Protection League, is also actively involved in rescuing stray cats and dogs and helping them to become adopted.

“I teach them basic good manners to help them be

more adoptable,” she said.

Morgan would like to expand, and is currently developing a concept for a new pet services complex.

She envisions a cluster of pet-related businesses that would offer training, daycare, grooming and boarding services, along with medical treatment and retail sales of pet products.

Included in the plan is space for a non-profit animal rescue organization to house stray dogs and cats in a zoo-like setting.

Morgan has been searching for a location in the East Providence or Seekonk, Mass., area, and is hoping to attract corporate sponsors who are interested in the idea.

“This would be a totally different concept in animal shelters. But, obviously we are going to need donations to make it happen,” she said.