

Linda

of A Tail Away in Canton

Linda, can you briefly walk us through your story - how you started and how you got to where you are today.

Dogs have always been my passion and I have wanted a "doggie hotel" since childhood. Five years ago, the research began to go from dream to reality. After pet sitting for friends or family over 30 years, certain resort features were known but many were not. With help from a talented dog trainer plus an experienced home designer, the puzzle pieces took shape.

My 4-acre property became not only home but also the exclusive pet resort that loving fur parents want. Ideas and changes have evolved from the first work day. Thanks to Smart phone technology, each owner receives photos and videos of their pet playing throughout the day and makes for really happy parents. It is fun for me to enjoy my dog guests and provide their parents with peace of mind in knowing their pet is safe and happy.

The spacious yard allows guests to stretch out at a full run while smiling all the while. What a joy to watch when the dogs make new friends with others then run off to play. All of the acre back yard is fenced and locked because security is a priority for guests. Clients are scheduled by appointment only, which is an extra safety precaution. No outside doors can be opened by surprise.

My clients and dog guests have helped my dream come true as well as allowed me to give back to the community by helping both Canine Assistants (an organization that trains and provides service dogs for children or adults with physical disabilities) and the Military Working Dog Team Support Association (which aids current or retired military dog handler teams, plus war dog or dog team memorials). What a fulfilling time the past four years have been! Have met wonderful clients and their fur kids, which has certainly enriched my life. Am grateful that my "high dive" into the unknown has provided my guests and me with new friends and more fun to look forward to!

Overall, has it been relatively smooth? If not, what were some of the struggles along the way?

Has definitely not been a smooth road. Since I am home based, some clients think it is fine to call me after hours or want to drop off dogs at 8 pm. Boundaries had to be established and enforced. Discovering the boundaries was a learning curve as well. Because I am home based, the "work" environment is different. It requires discipline and sacrifice.

If I didn't love the dogs, it wouldn't work. There is an 8 dog maximum boarding on any given day. It is always full at school breaks, holidays, or summer months. At least 5 - 6 guests stay during the rest of year all potential guests are evaluated before being allowed to stay. Any dog exhibiting aggression, non-social, or questionable behavior is not allowed to board.

- Duties are numerous and not all done on daily basis:
- Feed breakfast plus dinner & water dogs (2 hrs. approx.)
- Take all dogs out 5 - 6 times per day (5 hrs., including feedings, approximately)
- Take pictures and videos of dogs
- Text updates to clients
- Edit pictures of dogs then send to clients
- Mop and vacuum for maintenance and after each dog leaves
- Scoop poop
- Pick up debris in yard
- Weed
- Use leaf blower to clean sidewalk and under deck
- Answer phone calls inquiring on business
- Invoice clients

Today we'd like to introduce you to Linda



Check out A Tail Away:

Email reminders to clients; review emails
 Give tours (which take 30 - 45 minutes each)
 Clean office
 Data entry for revenue
 Data entry for tax return
 Order supplies
 Run errands
 etc....

No way to specifically say how much time any particular activity takes. Every day is different, depending on the dogs and their needs. On a typical day with a full house, I spend at least 1 hour each at breakfast/dinner putting food down plus taking dogs out to potty. Other outings (3 additional) may take approx. 1 hour each, which could equal 5 hours of just feeding/potty runs. In between those rounds, I have to squeeze in marketing, invoicing, cleaning, errands, personal things, etc. My day starts at 6 am and usually finishes around 10:30 - 11 pm.

Alright - so let's talk business. Tell us about A Tail Away - what should we know?

I have a home based dog boarding business. My specialty is providing care like no other facility, where the dogs go home calm and relaxed. I achieve this by paying more attention to each guest and introducing them to other dogs which they are compatible with. My resort is almost like the dogs being at their own home. I play classical music for them all day. The room dividers were designed so that they cannot see each other. It cuts down on barking and aggressive behavior.

Am at the point where I can be picky on who gets reservations. If a dog turns out to be a barker or trouble maker, it is not invited to stay again. There is not a bunch of barking with my dogs and that makes for every guest getting a peaceful stay while on vacation. Am on top of cleaning too. By letting the dogs out at least 5 times a day, I rarely have accidents inside. My place smells cleaner than any vet's office or boarding facility around. The fresh smell inside as well as my acre + back yard set me apart from other places. No one has a yard like I do.

I am most proud of my ability to "read" dogs and allow them to meet other guests I know they will be fine with. Have rarely had dog fights. My clients love it when I send videos of their dog playing with someone new. I provide plenty of pictures and videos of their pet which is something else not many places do.

Any shoutouts? Who else deserves credit in this story - who has played a meaningful role?

Melony Phillips, a dog trainer friend with her own facility in Marietta, GA, (Delightful Dog Professional Play care), has multiple certifications and years of experience. She told me of a dog boarding expo held every year. This expo was more than I could afford to attend while I was in the research phase. She went then shared information and contact phone numbers with me.

That made me aware of Mason Company kennel enclosures, Pet Boarding & Daycare Magazine, plus multiple other dog facility specific items. What a huge blessing. I was able to figure out products to buy and the right way to have my home built. My home designer, Jannis Vann (Jannis Vann & Assoc), who has won national awards for home design, shaped my ideas and came up with house plans specific to my personal and business needs. She has networked for me and praised my services to her clients and friends. Her daughter is one of my first clients.

Lamar Prance, Cherokee Flooring, helped during my building phase and provided not only sound advice but sub-contractors names and phone numbers. He continues to be a fabulous sounding board for me and tells life from the wisdom of both business ownership and age experience.

Dr. Sharon Johnston, Adaptive Attitudes in Fitness, is my naturopathic doctor. Have been seeing her for the past 10 years. She is one of the few women business owners I know that are sole proprietors. She's been in business over 25 years and spoken with me about my ideas then challenged me to work through the issues. Her business experience helped me to shape my own. An amazing benefit for me. Rachel Johnston, my website designer, did a spectacular job with my website and logo design.

