

# The Weekly Record

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## PAWS is the perfect social spot for dogs

Unique pet care facility comes to Port Charlotte

By TEDDI THOSATH

SUN INTERN

Walking into the Paws Dog Daycare business in Port Charlotte, it is easy to tell the place is for the dogs.

The happy barks coming from the new business also gives hints that this is no ordinary doggy daycare.

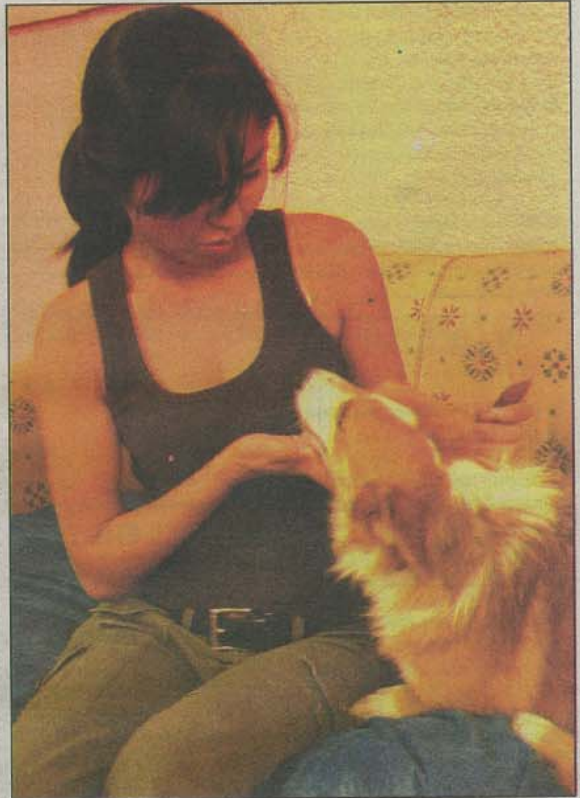
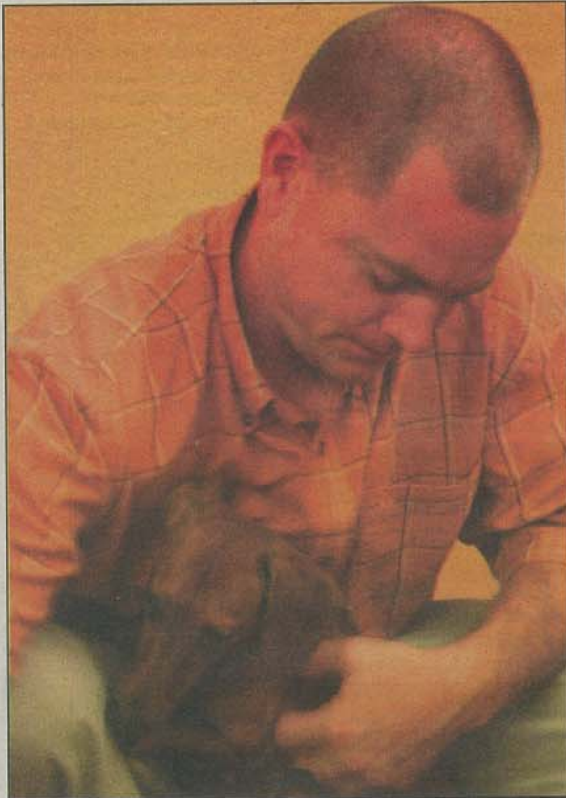
"There is no service like this in the area that caters to dogs," said owner Kevin Witherill, 30.

Along with his wife, Maki, Witherill opened Paws Dog Daycare in April. The doggy daycare center offers a number of services for their four-legged and two-legged customers. They provide all day care, grooming, dog suites, obedience training and more.

Born in Athens, GA, Witherill said he grew up on a farm with 13-14 dogs, and has always had a love for animals. After joining the U.S. Marine Corps in 1995, he worked with dogs as a canine behavioralist and



ON THE RECORD



SUN PHOTOS BY MYBRIAH GOSSETT

**At left:** At Paws Dog Daycare, owner Richard Witherill spends time with the dogs Thursday at their newly opened Port Charlotte location. **At right:** Maki Witherill, co-owner of Paws Dog Daycare, spends some time in the large dog play area Thursday in Port Charlotte.

trainer, teaching them to sniff out explosives.

In 2003, Witherill and Maki moved to Port Charlotte, and quickly realized the need for this service. He is a member of the Association of Pet Dog

Trainers and an American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen Program evaluator.

The facility offers dogs of all sizes and ages to play during the day. All of the dogs are supervised during their stay. Witherill's father,

David, also works at the business. The facility offers two play areas, a number of "pet suites," a grooming area, and Witherill said they can even provide obedience training during day care.

Dogs and their owners go

through an interview prior to dog care to "make sure their dog is suitable to bring into the daycares' pack."

As the dogs excitedly

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**PAWS,**  
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wagged their tails and barked, Witherill explained the new business.

**Why did you want to open Paws?**

**Richard:** There was nothing that catered to pets. We had pet stores, grooming, boarding, but nowhere for them to socialize and be at during the day. There is no service like this in the area. My clients don't have two legs, they have four. The main benefit is for the dogs.

**What benefits does the daycare provide?**

**Richard:** Dogs are social animals. They need interaction with other dogs and people on a regular basis. As humans, we take one dog and leave it at home when we are at work. Think of it if you were out (in the fenced backyard) all by yourself in the same place every day. It would get boring, and then bad behavior would happen.

One service that we provide is allowing the dogs to socialize. It helps eliminate anti-social behaviors, destructive behaviors — a lot of bad behavior. They get to be around dogs and play. One of the things we do differently is (the dogs) don't

stay trapped the whole time. They really enjoy it. We did it to make it nice.

**How did you design this 2,500-square-foot facility?**

**Richard:** We designed it to be dog-friendly. The walls are coated with concrete to prevent scratches, for example. I sat back and looked at the grooming facilities, the pet stores and requirements (when designing the place). It's got to have space to play, and age, wanted it to be escape-proof — we keep a minimum of two doors between them and freedom.

**What is a typical day like**

**for the dogs at the daycare?**

**Richard:** Dogs generally check in from 7 — 9 a.m. Then from about 9:30 a.m. they are played with ... tug of war, bubbles, treat time, we run around with them. Everything dog related. From 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. is nap time. We play soft jazz music, turn down the lights.

From 1 — 4 p.m. we're going at it again. Playing. All the stuff they need. Then from 4 p.m. until 6 p.m., we calm it down again so (the dogs) are not bouncing off the walls when mom or dad come.

**Is there anything you want the community to know?**

**Richard:** How much the dogs enjoy it. And how much more a benefit it is for them than staying home all day. The benefit is for the dogs. Everyone here is nice.

Paws is open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. and Saturday 8 a.m. until 4. For more information, stop by the facility located at 3681 Tamiami Trail, Port Charlotte, call 941-258-3647 or visit [www.pawsdogdaycare.com](http://www.pawsdogdaycare.com). They can also be e-mailed at [customerservice@pawsdogdaycare.com](mailto:customerservice@pawsdogdaycare.com).

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