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MIKE WENDLAND

Doggy cams let owners peek in on pets

In Troy, there's a doggy day care center with a high-tech twist — eight webcams that allow pet owners to check up on Fido while at work or on vacation.

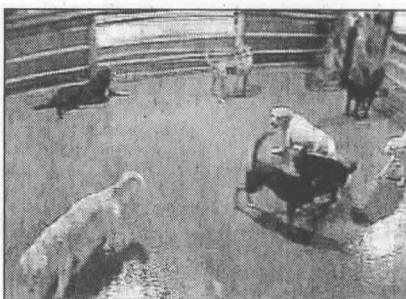
Think of it as an indoor/outdoor bark park, one of those popular fenced-in areas cropping up at parks and recreation areas where dogs can stretch their legs without having to be on a leash. This time, though, a camera is always watching.

On an average workday, franchise owner Ann Roth says there are 30 to 40 pooches fetching on the Frisbee field, playing in the Puppy Pasture, chillin' out around Campfire Circle or just wandering around the Wagpole.

Those campy names are some of the different rooms and outdoor exercise areas the center, called Camp Bow Wow, offers its canine clients. Every area is wired with a live webcam that streams out nonstop video images of pets at play.

"Working people feel guilty about leaving them 12 hours a day, so having a place to leave them for fun and exercise is a relief," says Roth, who, with husband Bob, opened the center last spring in an industrial building near Maple and Rochester Road. "And then being able to see them on the Net is a big extra."

The pets are supervised by a staff of 15 workers — called counselors, of course — who can break up any disagreements that arise, provide some affection, toss the Frisbee or offer personalized feeding or medication as instructed by



campbowwowusa.com

The Camp Bow Wow day care center in Troy has cameras in many areas.

the owner.

The Camp Bow Wow webcams make for lots of action. Roth says some dog owners leave a camera up all the time on their computers as they do their work in the office, glancing at it from time to time to see how their pooch is doing.

The dogs are generally segregated by size. All have to be friendly and not aggressive. In most rooms, the cameras show them always on the move, running, wrestling and having doggy fun, as clearly evidenced by wagging tails.

An outdoor area called the Campfire Circle is a favorite. On the day I brought it up on my computer last week, it was particularly popular with a golden retriever and a black lab. They kept taking turns running up and down a slide.

"They get pretty tired out," says Roth. "They basically play all day long."

In one room,

called the Paw'villion, there's a big overstuffed sofa. When I checked Friday, there was a pooped pup snoozing on it.

Frequently the cameras show workers walking among the dogs, liberally dispersing pets and scratches and — occasionally — pushing a mop to clean up after a puppy accident.

The cameras, which are accessed through the camp's Web site, offer zoom-in and zoom-out controls. You can select among any of the eight cameras. There's even a snapshot function that captures a freeze-frame of the live action. (To take a look, visit www.campbowwowusa.com and click on the Doggy Cam link.)

The Camp Bow Wow chain is headquartered in Colorado, and now has 15 operations in five states.

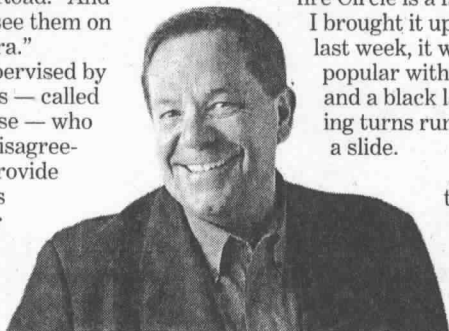
It isn't cheap. Costs are \$25 a day, though frequent camper packages can be bought that lower that a bit. You can drop off dogs as early as 6:30 a.m. and pick them up as late as 7 p.m.

The dog day care industry has a huge potential. Americans spend some \$34 billion a year on pets each year, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

Dogs are the most popular pet, with 43 percent of all U.S. households owning at least one.

"What we hear over and over again from the dog owners," says Camp Bow Wow manager Geoff Pearts, "is that it gives them so much peace of mind to be able to log on throughout the day from work and see that their pet is having a good time."

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