

Something for Spot

Doggie day-care franchises offer Rover room with a woof



Kelly Beasley, owner of Camp Bow Wow Doggie Day Care of Golden, sits with some of the dogs being housed at the franchise center. Beasley, her husband and six employees, most of whom are dog trainers or veterinary tech graduates, run the 7,000-square-foot facility, which also has a large yard with three separate play areas.

By Nora Cahy

ORIGINAL TO THE NEWS

Ten years ago, Heidi Flamming knew she wasn't feeling professionally fulfilled with her job in pharmaceutical sales. She also knew she and her husband, Blon, loved their dogs. So they decided to start a business based on their love for dogs and the fact that people like to spend money on pets. They wrote a business plan for a doggie day-care center, something not popular back then.

Then Blon died in a plane crash. Flamming's family and friends rushed to help her not only handle her grief but to continue her doggie day-care dream. Her brother, Patrick Haight, delayed his career plans so he could help with day-to-day operations. Her friend Kerilyn Vietti helped set up a Web site. Flamming handled marketing. She found a public relations firm near Chicago and attended zoning meetings to explain the difference between a kennel and an animal-care facility.

It took Flamming a few more years than she'd planned, but in 2000 she opened her first Camp Bow Wow in Denver. A year later she opened a second location, in Broomfield.

Most customers send their dogs to a Camp Bow Wow only two or three days a week. Humans can check the Web cam on Camp Bow Wow's Web site to see if their dogs are getting enjoyment for the \$20-to-\$25 daily fee.

Dogs must pass an interview process. The owner fills out a form and the dog meets the other dogs at the center.

"I always imagined we'd open four or five corporate stores, but then people were calling and saying, 'Help me start one of these,'" Flamming said.

There were other doggie day-care centers, including a Camp Bow Wow in San Jose, Calif., which is not affiliated with Flamming's company. "But no one was franchising, so I saw a huge opportunity."

She got involved with the International Franchise Association. She hired lawyers, a bigger expense than employee salaries, she said. In May 2003, the first Camp Bow Wow franchise opened.

Camp Bow Wow

■ **Business:** Franchise dog day-care centers

■ **Headquarters:** 1660 17th St., Suite 450, Denver, 1-866-821-0409

■ **Franchise locations:** Denver, Broomfield, Golden, Boulder

■ **E-mail:** franchise@campbowwowusa.com

■ **Web site:** www.campbowwowusa.com

Today there are seven locations, the newest in Boulder. Flamming has signed agreements to open 24 centers by 2006. While most are in Colorado, she also has agreements with franchisees who will open in Michigan, New Jersey, Florida and Indiana.

The LoDo-based franchise company has four employees. Flamming spends half her time in Denver and half in California, where she is setting up a division of Camp Bow Wow franchises that also will have veterinary clinics.

The franchise fee to open a Camp Bow Wow is \$30,000, as well as a royalty of 5 percent of gross sales. Flamming is picky when choosing franchisees, who not only have to like dogs, but also have experience running a business.

"It's very difficult when starting out a franchise company to turn away people like that who are offering a check for \$30,000," she said.

Most of the franchisees are age 25 to 45 and come from corporate backgrounds. About two-thirds are from the high-tech industry. Most are women.

"Women entrepreneurs tend to go toward something they are passionate about, while men tend to go toward just a business model and what makes sense," she said. "Women connect with how much they love dogs."

Kelly Beasley, who recently opened a Camp Bow Wow near Golden, was laid off from a tech job two years ago. She met Flamming through Beasley's husband, who knew Flamming's brother. She signed the franchise agreement last December, then searched for a

large site that was properly zoned.

"We found one ... zoned for an animal hospital but not for dogs to play outside," Beasley said. "We had to fill out forms, get signatures from neighbors, and go to a meeting with the zoning department."

The neighbors, mostly industrial park tenants, didn't object to a day-care center for dogs opening there. The Camp Bow Wow on 13101 W. 43rd Drive in Golden opened in July.

The 7,000-square-foot building has a large yard with three separate play areas. Beasley and her husband, Stewart, run the location with six employees, mostly dog trainers, veterinary tech graduates recruited from Denver-based Bel-Rea Institute of Animal Technology and people who have worked for animal shelters. Employees undergo training, including canine CPR and first aid.

Beasley advertised the grand opening in local newspapers in Golden, Arvada and Wheat Ridge. She also gets customers from the Broomfield and Denver Camp Bow Wows when they are full.

Janet Long, who opened the Boulder Camp Bow Wow this month, used to work as vice president of development for Lakeshore Athletic Club in Chicago. When she opened a club location in Broomfield, she decided to leave Lakeshore and move to Colorado. She wanted to open her own doggie day-care center, but soon realized it would be easier to buy a franchise.

The Boulder location, 3631 Pearl St., has 7,200 square feet of interior facilities and a 5,000-square-foot outdoor play area. As with other Camp Bow Wow locations, the Boulder site has an area where dogs can lounge on the furniture. There are also 45 "cabins," or kennels for overnight boarding.

Flamming finally quit her pharmaceutical job a year after opening the first Camp Bow Wow. Her brother has gone back to school to be a sound engineer.

Flamming said Camp Bow Wow is partnering with local animal shelters. The camps donate a portion of revenues to local shelters, and also will take in a foster dog so that dog owners might consider adopting a shelter dog.

"We're trying to create a really charitable, wonderful organization," Flamming said.