

## Customers unleash demand for Barkley pet hotel's offerings

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A young Labrador commandeers a water hose Tuesday in a play yard at The Barkley Hotel & Day Spa for pets in Westlake Village.



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As the Barkley Pet Hotel & Day Spa in Westlake Village prepares to celebrate its anniversary, Stan Slaton, a managing partner, is pleased with its success.

Slaton, responsible for overseeing a good deal of the planning and building of the facility — 32,000 square feet of a 56,000-square-foot building — said it began to break even the first month. He expected first-year gross revenues of \$2 million, but now anticipates figures closer to \$3 million.

His philosophy has been, "If I build it, they will come" — and they have. His attention to detail has attracted pet lovers to Barkley's luxury suites, all with flat-screen televisions, "snoutcams" for owners to watch their pets on the Internet all the time, tummy rubs and bedtime stories. The luxury suites range from \$65 to \$90, with prices varying during peak holiday times.

The standard dog accommodations cost \$44.50 or \$49.50, depending on the size of the dog. Kitty City Condos are \$33.50. Those areas have one television for all the guests. Slaton thinks pets enjoy watching the Animal Planet channel or at least having the noise for company. There is a saltwater fish tank for stimulation.

Dogs get three walks, maid and linen service, and breakfast and supper service.

"Check-in is 3 p.m. and checkout is 12 because we have to prepare the room, change the sheets, just like a human hotel," said Malia Rivera, Barkley's director of marketing.

"If anyone comes to see our facility, they will know we have spent a lot of money for the safety and care of their pet," Slaton said. "We spent a fortune on air filtering systems to take extra steps for their health. We have security cameras everywhere. Our floors are epoxy throughout so no fluids can be absorbed. Our natural skylights are more soothing for dogs. The little things we've done make it more comfortable."



In the year, the facility has amassed 5,000 clients, averaging more than 400 new customers per month.

This summer, Barkley also installed outdoor cabana shading and a misting system.

"That cools off the area as much as 30 degrees in the summer," Slaton said. "Dogs can get heat stroke pretty easily."

Barkley also provides what it calls trans"paw"tation by limousine. According to Rivera, the limo is booked nearly every day with a run. Local one-way fares are \$45. For the pet hankering for a burger, a ride to McDonald's costs \$30.

"It's very popular," Rivera said. "We have guests who frequently get pickup and delivery for their animals every day from the Four Seasons Hotel."

Barkley's Grooming Salon has added two stations and recently introduced nontoxic vegetable gel-based fur-dyeing. The top-of-the-line add-on service, the \$45 Celebrity Package, includes tooth brushing, pedicure, mud mask, facial and head massage.

The small indoor dog play area has expanded 50 percent for the day camp.

"It's a very important part of our business because the success of it is not as seasonal as boarding," Slaton said. "Typically, we have anywhere from 50 to 70 day-camp dogs, and then we might have another 20 dogs from our overnight guests. Our target is to have 100 dogs a day. It's a large piece of revenue that helps support our overhead when our boarding might be slow."

Boarders can get grooming services, day camp or a dip in the Barkley Beach pool during a stay.

With the holidays coming, Slaton said the pet hotel hopes to increase boarding accommodations.

"We sold out Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year's," he said. "A sellout is 220 pets for any given night. We actually oversold the place. We had to convert bathrooms and offices to little dog suites because people were begging us to let their pet stay."

This year during the holidays, Barkley is offering a slumber party for the social day-camp dogs.

"We'll start off with 20 small dogs and 20 large dogs. The small and large dogs are separated in our day camps," Slaton said.

In addition to day camp, boarding and grooming, training boot camp, including all the boarding, costs \$3,575 and comes with a lifetime guarantee.

Another attraction is the Westlake Village Animal Hospital, which is next door in the same building and run by Slaton's son, Dr. Daniel Slaton and his partner, Dr. Steven Rosenstein. It has 24-hour on-call emergency care.

Daniel S. Smith and Kimberly Mellon-Smith have boarded their West Highland white terrier, Charlie Tully, four times in the Serenity Suite, coupled with two-day camp during a four-day stay. They also have used the grooming and medical facility.

"It's a professional, trusted and caring environment. They have a 24/7 supervisory staff on duty plus a medical facility," Smith said. "When we're traveling, it gives us a sense of comfort knowing that he's being taken totally care of."

Rochelle Wallach has boarded her Labrador retriever mix, Sadie, and uses the day camp, sometimes three days a week.

"When she sees the Barkley door, her tail starts wagging and she tries to push the door open. She can't wait to get inside," Wallach said. "She's a rescue, and I feel like she's gone through a lot, so I wouldn't just put her anywhere. I want her to be in a secure place where she's going to be protected. They are such a caring and nurturing facility. What I liked was they evaluate the dogs before they go into the day camp so they know there isn't going to be any aggressive behavior. That gave me a real sense of security. After I took a tour, I thought, 'I wish I could stay there.' "

Slaton said Barkley offers discounts for multiple pets and that boarding and day-camp packages are available for better pricing.

"They can use the boarding package days anytime, and there are no blackout dates," Slaton said. "They get really good rates during our peak season. Some people think of this as luxury for the dogs, but if you look at the population and the baby boomers, our kids are gone, and our pets have become our kids."

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