

AUG 08

Vol 10

Issue 4

Simsbury LIFE



Dogs that attend Creecture Comforts are treated to agility training by trainer Debby McCulloch.



Elayne Cree and Kyla Rypl of Creecture Comforts will pet sit and more.

Business

Four-legged friends need some comforts, too

by Kelly Callaghan

Zeke, Ollie and Reggie were so excited when Noah came bounding through the gate that they met him and promptly began jumping all about and splashing in the kiddie pool.

Their high jinks caught the attention of Bert and Ernie, who were in the house and were crying to come out and play. Sounds like a child's day care or summer camp, right? Wrong.

Ollie is a golden Labrador retriever, Zeke and Reggie are shelties, Noah is a Chesapeake Bay retriever, Bert is a yellow lab/hound mix and Ernie is a fox hound mix.

Creecture Comforts, located at 201 Great Pond Road at the Mew, offers doggie day camp for owners who want their four-legged pooches to enjoy socialization. They get to romp, play and fetch in Elayne Cree's one acre fenced in yard.

Ms. Cree, who has operated a marketing business, Cree Communications, since 1991, has always had a love of dogs and wanted to create a business catering to dog and cats, too.

While living in South Carolina and California, she was instrumental in creating dog parks in those states, as well as the dog park in Granby. She was also recently certified by the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters.

Ms. Cree and her husband have always had dogs, no matter where they've lived. Prior to their hounds Bert and Ernie, they had a Dalmatian, who loved to be walked and tired out.

In late 2006, after taking some part-time jobs as a pet sitter and dog walker in town, Ms. Cree needed her own pet sitter and dog walker when she broke her ankle. It also gave her some ideas.

"I starting thinking well, maybe I can do this myself. I realized that I needed some help."

She asked Kyla Rypl, another local pet sitter with extensive experience, if she'd like to go into business.

Ms. Rypl has worked at local doggie day cares, kennels and as a pet sitter prior to joining forces with Ms. Cree, who said many are shocked that such a service is offered.

"People just love it," Ms. Rypl said. "It's brilliant."

According to the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters, the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association expects spending on pet services will increase about 7 percent this year.

"The pet-sitting business is actually quite good," said Felicia Lembesis, executive director of the association. "It is increasing despite the economy."

Ms. Rypl said pet sitting first became popular in big cities and then progressed to the suburbs. People

who are used to leaving their dogs home alone for eight hours or more now have Creecture Comforts as an option.

The base rate is \$25 per full day, \$18 for a half day. Pickup and drop-off options and coupon options are available. Working with the pet owner is most important, the pair said.

"We try to come up with solutions for people, not pre-packaged things," Ms. Cree said. "That's one of the great things about in-home pet care."

Ms. Rypl agreed, as Trevor sat in her lap.

"It's much more tailor made. We try to get everybody set," she said.

Some clients just want their dog walked during the day. Others may want their dogs boarded at Creecture Comforts and then attend day camp. In other cases, puppies and older dogs can't go through the whole day indoors without a bathroom break.

"It works out well for everybody," said Ms. Rypl. "We're happy and the dogs are happy."

Many times clients have told the pair that they've noticed a change in their dog's behavior since attending day camp.

"They live in our world with our rules so much, it's nice to see them together," Ms. Cree said.

Clients embarking with Creecture Comforts are asked to fill out either a boarding agreement or day care agreement, depending on the type of service requested. Dogs must be up to date on vaccines, including bordatella, otherwise known as kennel cough. Clients also fill out questionnaires regarding their pet's personality and habits.

A sun-splashed hot afternoon might find the five to six dogs (six is the maximum allowed to attend day camp by the town) running around the fenced-in backyard and splashing about in plastic kiddie pools.

Creecture Comforts pet sitter and agility trainer Wendy McCulloch typically will take the dogs through an training session, complete with canine agility equipment. Debby Williams also works for the business as a pet sitter.

Ms. Cree's backyard is shaded and gives the campers enough room to run and play. During the colder months, Creecture Comforts takes a turn indoors.

Both Creecture Comforts and Cree Communications are housed in a converted garage area adjacent to her home and driveway. Her office space gives way to a climate-controlled area that contains a handful of blanket-filled dog crates, plenty of water bowls and a padded indoor garage that any dog would want to play in.

Dogs who might be attending Creecture Comfort, in addition to the various pages of paperwork and vaccination records required by the owner, are also screened by Ms. Cree.

"If you want to board, the dog can't be a barking nuisance," she said.

She admitted she's picky about the dogs she takes, since she can only admit six.

Since starting the business almost two years ago, the pair have had their share of walking a bundle of dogs only to get wide-eyed stares and questions from curious passers-by. Before Ms. Cree had her yard fenced in, she would take a group of leashed dogs across the street into Great Pond State Park to walk and swim.

The pair also speak fondly and comically of a pet-sitting job they had that involved more than just dogs. A Bloomfield couple had to quickly get rid of stock from their pet store, so the only way was for them to take the boatload of critters into their home.

Ms. Cree and Ms. Rypl were hired to visit the home a few times each day to feed everything from dogs and cats to ducks, reptiles and birds.

Ms. Rypl was in charge of the reptiles and exotic animals, while Ms. Cree was in charge of the cats, dogs and ducks. While the furred and "unfurred" kept them hopping, they enjoyed the experience.

"That was fun," Ms. Rypl said.

"The cats and dogs were a breeze," Ms. Cree said. "It was an experience."

Ms. Rypl is not afraid of any animal.

"I've had animals my whole life," she said.

Her first official job was working in a kennel and a doggie day care.

"I never baby-sat as a teen. I always took care of the neighbors dogs and cats," she said.

Once she met Ms. Cree, she was hooked on working as a pet sitter.

"She said 'you know, let's do it.' It's perfect. I'm still young, but she's taught me a lot about business and interacting with clients. I'm always out in the field and I always have to remember my business cards," she said.

These days, Ms. Rypl is carting around Trevor, a terrier that she pet sits on a daily basis. He has his own pet seat belt and rides in the back with her dog, a shitzu. She said as a pet sitter, "you can have a lot of pets without having a lot of pets," which makes sense.

Dan Millstein brought his dog Noah over to spend the afternoon one day. He heard about Creecture Comforts from his former wife, who won a coupon for a free pet sitting from the business.

"We do a lot of traveling, so this is great," he said. "I can't imagine putting him in a regular kennel where he's basically penned up. Here, it's like camp and he runs right in."

Ms. Cree, who thought of the name of the business pretty easily, said she loves to be with the dogs.

"I don't know too many people who get rich from this, but you are just the most popular person when you walk through the door," she said of the greetings she gets from her four-legged clients.

For more information on Creecture Comforts call 651-7773 or see www.creecturecomforts.com. **SL**