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TANYA WILLIAMS - co-owner of Camp Bow Wow



Camp Bow Wow co-owner Aaron Buche gives foster dog Daisey an ear rub Friday afternoon at the doggie day care. Employee Holly Martinson, background, plays with dogs in a large-group play area.

EYE FOR DOG CARE

BY JIM BAINBRIDGE
THE GAZETTE

Gary Patton was on a business trip last fall to the Republic of Georgia, half a world away, when he decided he'd take a break to go online and see how his beloved golden labrador was doing back home in Colorado Springs.

A few mouse clicks later, he

was looking in at Camp Bow Wow's dog exercise area, trying to find Samson among the pups running around on his screen.

"The problem was that there were a lot of golden labradors that day," said his wife, Scarlett Patton, "and he couldn't tell which one was ours. So he got on his cell phone and asked if someone would go into the corral for him and

point Samson out so he could see him play."

One of Camp Bow Wow's employees brought Samson right up to one of the facility's eight Web cams for a close-up and then turned him loose so he could be watched in full dog-slobbering flight.

If this seems a tiny bit exces-

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sive, or even a little odd, you're probably not living in one of the 40.6 million U.S. households with dogs ensconced as members of the family, lavished with unstinting care.

The amount Americans will spend on their pets this year is projected to be \$35.9 billion, double that of 10 years ago, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

Franchise operations like Camp Bow Wow, near Interstate 25 and Garden of the Gods Road, and Top Dog, near I-25 and Fillmore Street, are more than kenels with cameras. They handle overnight boarders and are embracing the relatively new "doggie day care" phenomenon, where working people bring in their dogs to spend the day getting exercise and fresh air.

What they are selling, really, is peace of mind.

"So many people have gotten in trouble for having (the Web cam) on all the time at work," said Corey Miller, Top Dog's director of business development. "We have one camera now, and we're installing another for our small dog play area in a few weeks. There's just a settling feeling being able to log on and see your dog playing."

"We had a customer go online from a Caribbean cruise ship at \$4 a minute. I've got to admit I've done it myself, when I was in Puerto Rico last month. It makes you feel better."

Before a dog is accepted at either facility, there is a sort of pet "interview" to determine whether the dog will be compatible with the others so no one is attacked. Both facilities ensure that staffing is sufficient and that play that turns rough is halted promptly.

With a 7,100-square-foot facility, Camp Bow Wow can handle more than 80 dogs safely but averages 40 to 50 a day at about \$20 each. Although about 60 percent of them are boarded, co-owner Tanya Williams sees the ratio shifting so that it will soon be "50-50 or even flip the other



CAROL LAWRENCE, THE GAZETTE
Camp Bow Wow employee Holly Martinson plays with a group of larger dogs Friday as a beagle watches. The dogs are separated according to size.

way to 60-40 for doggie day care."

A franchise from the Park-er-based parent company costs \$30,000. It took the partnership of Tanya and her husband, Kevin, and Leslie and Aaron Buche six months to see a profit after opening their business Dec. 19, 2003. They are opening a second franchise in Monument next month.

Camp Bow Wow has 10 franchises, with nine more due to open by fall and another 13 in the offing. The company is registered to operate anywhere in the United States except Virginia and Washington, D.C., said Cricket Christgau, director of development.

Aaron Buche is the operations manager for the local franchise, coordinating 13 mostly part-time employees, with Kevin Williams, who's a tech guy, maintaining the Web cams. Tanya Williams and Leslie Buche are CPAs, so they work on the books and Williams also looks after human resources and marketing.

"It's very exciting," Tanya Williams said. "I think we are raising standards of overnight boarding and doggie day care. At the end of the day, when an owner comes to pick up his dog and the dog's not rushing to get out of the facility, then we know we're doing something right."