



TOP to BOTTOM

Wagtime offers a wide array of pet supplies, including outfits ranging from raincoat practical to “I can’t control my lick” funny.

Lisa Schreiber and Ofer Khal, owners of Wagtime, are swarmed by some of the smaller dogs temporarily residing on the top floor of the store’s Ninth Street NW location.



Babysitters for the Furry Kids

Wagtime Is a One-Stop Shop for Round-the-Clock Pet Care

ARTICLE AND PHOTOS BY KYLE JOHNSON

When Lisa Schreiber started a dog-walking business in Northwest Washington about 10 years ago, she was just trying to make some extra money to supplement her income from a retail job. Now, however, Schreiber and husband Ofer Khal think about dogs all day, everyday.

Schreiber and Khal own and operate Wagtime, located at 1232 Ninth St. NW, just across the street from the Walter E. Washington Convention Center. Wagtime provides all the services District pet owners need to take care of their beloved pets of all breeds and ages, offering boarding and daycare, grooming, dog walking and cat sitting.

In addition, Wagtime has a few unique services that are aimed at saving time for pet owners.

“Valet Barking” allows pet owners to drop off and pick up their pet, curbside, and drive off so they’re not stuck looking for a downtown parking spot in the morning. Wagtime also operates a van that picks up dogs at home and drops them off at the end of the day.

Schreiber, a Great Falls, Va., native, said most of Wagtime’s customers are young working couples without kids of their own.

“But with our clients, their dogs are their kids,” she said.

Many customers call in throughout the day to make sure Fido is fine, Khal said. Later this summer, concerned owners will be able to take advantage of the webcams installed throughout the store. Once operational, these webcams will transmit a 24-hour live feed of the rooms housing the dogs.

Bigger and Better

Wagtime is already in its third location, but this current spot should be home to the business for a long time.

Khal, who grew up in Tel Aviv, Israel, said they leased the main floor of their building starting about five years ago. Before Wagtime moved in, the site had been vacant for years.

“When we moved in, the building looked like it was ready to fall down on us,” he said. “But this is

a great location. When we moved in, I don't think we realized how good of a spot it was."

The building was put up for sale two years ago, and Schreiber and Khal decided to put in an offer so they wouldn't have to move again. They are just now finishing up a top-to-bottom remodeling of the building.

"We went to the bank and pretty much took out the biggest loan possible. Now we owe our lives to the bank, but it's worth it," Khal said.

Wagtime now operates out of the entire building, with grooming in the basement and a pet supply store operating on the ground floor.

Dogs at the store for boarding or daycare are split up based on size. The bigger dogs get a large room in the back of the store, with a narrow alley outside and a small overflow room in the basement connected via doggy doors, and the little dogs run the show on the top floor and the adjacent rooftop "Woof Deck." Seniors and other dogs that don't do well around others occupy a small room with a mural of famous dogs on the wall and soothing music playing from the nearby stereo.

Khal said Wagtime now averages about 60 dogs per day for daycare and boarding, and the staff has nearly doubled to 20 employees just over the past six months as business continues to grow.

The 'yuppie alternative'

Schreiber and Khal's business vision is best summarized as trying to do what's best for the animals. While the dogs are put into cages during mealtime, the rest of their stay at Wagtime is cage-free.

Dog beds are strewn across the dog rooms, and at least one employee stays at the store overnight to check up on the dogs spending the night.

"This is not a kennel," Schreiber said. "It's a yuppie alternative to a kennel."

Similarly, the products sold at the pet supply store have the best interests of animals in mind: words like "cage-free," "organic" and "all natural" are found on most of the packaging.

"We really put our heart into this, and I hope it shows," Schreiber said. "But it's hard work."

For more information on Wagtime, visit www.wagtimedc.com or call 202-789-0870. ★



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