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Pet Issue

Dog-ma Daycare & Boarding

Care for your Canine Companions

BY MICHAELA DOYLE



Early one morning, Rebecca Bisgyer arrived at Dog-ma to find one of her daycare dogs waiting patiently for the gate to open. Surprised to see Eris, a precocious Australian shepherd, outside of the gate with no owner in sight, Bisgyer went inside to call Alexis, Eris' owner. Meanwhile, across the Hill, Alexis was searching frantically for her dog. Earlier, her contractor told her that he had accidentally let Eris out of the house. Alone and confused outside of the yard, Eris had begun to wander the streets. Eris was the first dog in Dog-ma history to bring herself to daycare.

A Daycare Unlike Any Other

In 1998, Bisgyer was the vice president of a currency trading firm. "I felt I was good at what I did, but I didn't feel like I was doing a labor of love," said Bisgyer. She was the owner of two dogs whom she, like many other dog owners in the city, was reluctant to leave alone during the workday. In March of that year, she came up with a way to spend more time with her canine companions. Using her own experience as a model for her customers, she quit her job and opened Dog-ma inc., a daycare for dogs and the first of its kind in DC.

I arrived at Dog-ma during naptime to find a large fenced-in area with slides, a play car, two small pools and plenty of other play equipment. The doghouses were all to distinguish it from a children's daycare. Once inside, the staff welcomed me. I looked around to find dogs lying peacefully on cushions, dog beds, benches and the floor. Bisgyer, a petite woman, cheerful and animated, greeted me, and we sat down to talk as Hank, a hound mix, stretched out between us.

Aside from the mid-day nap, dogs at Dog-ma get plenty of exercise and playtime; but Dog-ma is also a place for dogs to learn. The staff, with a sensitivity to each dog's distinct personality, works on separation anxiety, socialization skills and curbing destructive behavior. Dog-ma also offers general obedience training. If a dog needs special attention, Bisgyer

Facing Page LEFT: Dogs love Dog-ma's dog house. Right: Rebecca Bisgyer, Dog-ma's owner, with her dog Seal. Photos courtesy of Dog-ma.

will refer the customer to Janet McMillan of Best Behaved Dogs, who works with individual dogs and offers a daily, two-week training program at the Dog-ma facility.

Dog-ma stands apart from similar businesses in the area as the only doggy daycare to offer outdoor facilities. This is great news for canine clients. The facility includes a large outdoor area for dogs to run, play and even swim on hot days. Several years ago, the DC government enacted zoning laws preventing doggy daycares from having outdoor facilities due to complaints from neighbors; Dog-ma was the only daycare to be grandfathered in.

In addition to having a large outdoor space, Dog-ma works hard to ensure that their daycare dogs are as happy and comfortable as possible. "In the last 10 to 20 years, the pet industry has boomed. Dogs have really gone from the backyard to the bedroom," said Bisgyer. "They are part of our families now." Similar to a private daycare for children, Dog-ma requires an extensive written application and an evaluation day to ensure the dog is a good fit.

Dog-ma, inc. is located at 821 Virginia Ave. SE. Daycare is \$35 per day. Dog-ma also offers a "bed and breakfast" as an overnight alternative to a kennel for \$48 per night. Dogs over 6 months must be spayed or neutered, and dogs under 6 months must have completed their puppy vaccines. Dogs should be generally in good health and must be friendly and willing to spend time with people and other dogs. Call 202-543-7805 or visit www.Dog-ma.com for more information. ★

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Capital Cats is a non-profit cat rescue organization on the Hill that has many wonderful, personable cats and kittens available for adoption to good homes.