

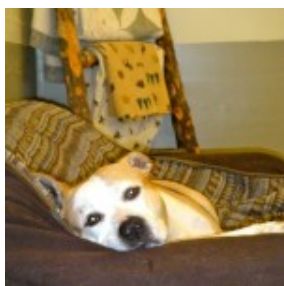
Homestyle boarding caters to 4-legged family members

By Kathryn Reed

“It’s a dog’s life” is being taken to a whole new level at Tahoe Best Friends.

Reaching down to pet one of her four legged customers, Paige Rice calls him by name. She knows all of their names. So do the other workers at this canine hotel in South Lake Tahoe.

This is no ordinary place to board a dog.



Harley sees no reason to greet a visitor at Tahoe Best Friends.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

“He had to have a couch to lay on and they have a couch to lay on,” says Edith Mankiewicz of Mr. Dutch, her shepherd-husky mix. “They let dogs do the normal things they do at home.”

The Stateline resident uses Tahoe Best Friends as doggie daycare three to four days a week. If she’s late coming back from her job in Carson City, she calls the boarding facility

to say Mr. Dutch will be having a sleepover.

About a year ago, Rice started the business out of her home. The desire by a growing number of dog owners to have a facility without kennels or cages led her to expand the business a little more than a month ago. Now she occupies about 2,000-square-feet of indoor space across from South Tahoe Refuse's recycling center, with about another 1,000-square-feet of outdoor play area.

Maureen Stuhlman is second in charge of the center.

One thing Stuhlman said dog owners like is being able to bring their own food so no intestinal issues arise with changing brands.

Windows to the outdoors and between the three indoor dog areas create airiness. One room is devoted to little dogs, another for big, the other for training. Doors can be opened so it's one big romper room.

Dogs of all sizes, breeds and ages tromp in and out. A wrestling match of sorts is going on in one corner. It looks like a pool party out back. Others are loafing on comfy couches and chairs by the fireplace or near the television.

A log cabin feel is what Rice is creating.

Shy dogs or ones lacking in social skills are introduced to the rest of the brood gradually. At most there are 25 dogs on any given day.

Zeke is Susan Frailey's first dog. The 11-month-old black Lab first visited Tahoe Best Friends at about 12 weeks old. Socialization was a big reason she picked this place.

"I feel like I'm taking my son to a really great day care," the Meyers resident said. "He is super excited every time we go there. We get to day care and he is so happy and ready to go play."

Zeke it at the center a couple days a week and spends the night when Frailey is out of town.

Lori MacDonald also liked the socialization aspect of Tahoe Best Friends when it came to finding a place for Miso. The teacup Yorkie was 5 months when she first stayed over.

The MacDonalds were in Tahoe earlier this summer staying at their timeshare that doesn't allow dogs. They had Miso spend the night, but picked her up during the day to play with them.

"The way she was introduced to the other dogs, they did it slow and one at a time," the Bay Area woman said. "She had not been around a lot of dogs before."

She said Miso didn't do any of that shaking or backing up that dogs are prone to do when they go to the vet or groomer. In fact, she made friends with a Great Dane and was eager to return to the center for the night.

"The hardest thing was explaining to my boys (ages 8, 11 and 13) that they could not spend the night. They could have spent hours there," MacDonald said.

Someone does spend the night – one of the 10 employees. A bed folds into the wall, but when it's down one or more dogs are often sharing space with the human.

With the center backing up to a residential area, the rules are owners can get their dogs between 7am and 7pm. Not much barking goes on. Mostly it's playful snarling that can be heard or a little dog ready to come out of the room.

For more information about Tahoe Best Friends, call (530) 542.2336 or [click here](#).

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