

Nation's RV Parks 'GOING TO THE DOGS' as Some Campground Owners Become More Pet-Friendly

RV parks that want to succeed are always looking for ways to cater to the needs of their guests, even the furry ones. With more than 50% of campers traveling with their pets, more campgrounds are striving to be pet-friendly.

Hundreds of privately owned RV parks and campgrounds are accommodating their guests with everything from doggie parks and exercise areas to environmentally friendly disposal products and services. As parks expand these features, a growing number of suppliers are entering the market with new products.

Normandy Farms in Foxboro, Mass., goes out of its way to accommodate guests who bring their pets by offering a dog park, pet-sitting and dog-themed activities. At Normandy Farms, in fact, dogs are greeted with a treat bag and given a name tag during their stay, which includes their site number. This proves very helpful should a dog become lost.

"We consider ourselves very dog-friendly," said Kristine Daniels, marketing director and a member of the Daniels family that owns the park. "This is partly due to a survey we conducted a couple of years ago in which we found that more than 50% of our guests travel with pets."

As a result, the Danielses decided to add a spacious dog park more than an acre in size. Complete with agility equipment, a dog wash, a fountain and, of course, a doghouse, the park-like setting contains shade trees and a five-foot fence around the perimeter.

In addition to the dog park, Normandy Farms has doggie stations located throughout its property with baggies to clean up after pets. Visitors will also find hitching posts to which guests can secure their pets while using the restroom facilities. For the 2010 season Normandy Farms has also designated one of its yurt rentals as pet-friendly, allowing up to two well-behaved dogs.

"Many of our guests are traveling to this area to tour Boston and Cape Cod, so we offer a pet-sitting service where we'll take dogs out for a walk while the owners are away," said Daniels.

An annual highlight of the park's focus on pets and their owners is an entire weekend dedicated to dogs. Aply named "Dog's Day Weekend," this year's event is set for May 14-16, 2010. Activities include dog-themed crafts and movies, a doggie costume parade and a dog show with contests for most obedient, best trick and most unusual.

RVers have many options from which to choose for accommodations, says Daniels. When searching for a place to stay, they will look for a park that has something for the entire family. "At Normandy Farms," said Daniels, "we recognize that dogs are part of the family, too."

Ocean Lakes Campground

Dogs are a large part of why many people camp, so RVers will spend their money at a place where the needs of their

pets are strongly considered. The owners of **Ocean Lakes Family Campground in Myrtle Beach, S.C.**, clearly care about their guests' pets.

"This year we have started the *I Care* program," said Barb Krumm, marketing director. "Because we have almost a mile of oceanfront and 18 beach access sites on our perimeter, we are concerned about the consequences of bacteria from pet pollution. Area officials are working to find new ways to filter water – instead of to the ocean.

"We provide pet welcome kits that are free and contain two Mutts Mitts and information about our *I Care* program that educates guests on the importance of picking up after their pets. Included is a map marking the location of all our 'Doggie Doo' stations."

The kits are distributed at Ocean Lakes' main check-in, rental office, sales office, golf cart building and recreation center. When guests enter one of these buildings, they will encounter statues of dogs that hold dog biscuits. "This directs their attention to the kits," Krumm said. "We also have educational signs by our main recycling center."

"We are all-accommodating," Krumm added. "We allow any breed of dog, excluding a Rottweiler or a pit bull because they scare people visually."

The 3,500-site park contains lakeside walking areas marked on the park's map as pet areas. This 310-acre area includes 11 "Doggie Doo" locations that dispense Mutts Mitt bags.

Ocean Lakes also hosts pet-related

For more information about featured parks or products, check out the following websites:

www.normandyfarms.com

www.oceanlakes.com

www.4pawskindgom.com

www.calarvc.com

www.campjellystone.com



www.koa.com

www.desertsedgerv.com

www.lakeconroe.com

www.muttmitt.com

www.dogipot.com

www.doggiedeposit.com

events throughout the year that not only benefit guests' pets, but animals from around the area. For six years running, the park holds a Patriotic Pet Parade on July 4. The \$5 donation to participate goes to the Noah Program. Handled by a local veterinarian, the program helps rescue and rehabilitate injured and stray animals.

"The program is really close to our heart," said Krumm. "And any animals in need of medical care while at our park go to this vet. There are also donation boxes by the pet welcome kits."

Another large event at Ocean Lakes is a Halloween pet costume contest, with more than 70 pets entered each year. The park even provides golf carts so older dogs can ride. But the event is not confined to the family pooch. Iguanas, lizards and guinea pigs also have dressed up for the parade.

"We have had guests dress up their whole family, including their dogs," said Krumm. "One family dressed up as the Scooby Doo gang with their dog as Scooby Doo. This year that same family

did the Wizard of Oz and that dog was the lion.

"There was also a girl that dressed her Chihuahua up like Barbie."

Four Paws Kingdom

If campgrounds were rated on a scale of 1 to 10 in dog-friendliness with 1 being the highest, **Four Paws Kingdom in Rutherfordton, N.C.**, would be an 1. Four Paws is doggie paradise exclusively dedicated to its guests and their canine companions.

Owners Meik and Birgit Bartoschek call themselves "dog crazy." The couple took their love of dogs to the next level when they opened Four Paws Kingdom seven years ago. "What distinguishes it the most is first of all the sheer size of our park, but also we have the staff that is not only there to make sure campers pick up after their dogs, but we have trainers that can do AKC certifications," explains Meik.

Bartoschek said Four Paws did it opposite of what most parks do. Instead of devoting most of the campground humans, his park is devoted mostly canines. "Just one quarter of the 33 acres we own is dedicated to camp sites and the rest is devoted to dogs," he said.

Four Paws has seven distinct off-leash areas for dogs and is working on its eighth location to be opened next year.

"This will be a playground closer to our pond area and it will be more accessible for people who don't want to walk far," Bartoschek said.

The parks' long list of amenities including a fully fenced dog park, agility fun playground, doggie bathhouse, grooming station, doggie swimming pond, training classes and workshop dog walking service and treats, treats and more treats make this a place campers and their pets will want to visit more than once.

Humans and dogs alike will enjoy the natural forest setting at Four Paws, with nicely landscaped RV sites large enough for class A's. Dogs are also allowed inside the cabins and trailers at the park.

California ARVC

Private park owners in California are becoming more aware of the needs of dog owners based on research that suggests more than half are traveling with pets, according to Debbie Sipe, executive director of the California Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds (CalARVC).

"Investing in pet-friendly services and amenities at your park pay off," Sipe said. "Campers that travel with pets appreciate and return to a park that provides more than just a gravel pet walk. I think we've really seen a difference



Dog and master get a drink along The Freedom Tail Park at Normandy Farms.

arks that are merely 'pet-friendly' from those that welcome pets with open arms."

While more than 90% of RV parks and campgrounds listed on www.Camp-California.com accept dogs, not all are going the extra mile. A handful of California parks are in fact investing in unique pet amenities and activities. They include:

• **Benbow Valley RV Resort in Garberville:** This park, part of the Benbow Valley Hotel and Resort, has its own "Salon de Soggy Doggy," an outdoor dog washing area that includes a raised platform and washbasin for easy access with a hose and shower nozzle with warm water.

• **Clio's Rivers Edge RV Park in Clio:** The 220-site park recently added a 20- by 40-foot dog run, which it plans to equip with exercise and dog play features. The park also allows dogs to swim the Feather River, which runs alongside the park.

• **Edgewater Resort in Kelseyville:** Edgewater not only gives each dog a treat and their own nametag when they arrive, but invites them to swim with their owners at its private beach, which fronts Clear Lake, California's largest natural body of water.

"There aren't many places where they let dogs swim, which is a shame since most dogs love to swim and play catch," said Sandra West, the park's owner.

But Edgewater Resort's dog-friendly approach has made it a top destination for camping enthusiasts who travel with their pets.

"At least half of the people who come here bring dogs," West said. "We probably have 30 to 50 dogs here every weekend."

• **San Francisco North/Petaluma KOA:** This campground is investing around \$200,000 in improvements this year, which include a 4,000-square-foot dog park.

• **San Diego KOA in Chula Vista:** This location has just completed construction of a 7,800-square-foot dog park containing agility obstacles and ball areas.

• **Yogi Bear's Jellystone Park in Cobb:** This park has themed weekends and related special activities throughout the summer, including a "Pets Weekend" (Aug. 1-2), with special activities involving animals, including a best-dressed pet contest.

Yogi Bear and KOA

Dean Crawford, executive vice president of Milford, Ohio-based Leisure Systems Inc. (LSI), franchisors of the Yogi Bear Jellystone Park Camp-Resorts, said most Jellystone Parks offer some level of dog-friendliness, with many providing designated pet areas and doggie waste bags. But more Jellystone Parks are going to the next level for canines by adding what they call "Bark Parks."

Rick Coleman, owner of Yogi Bear in Tabor City, N.C., has received a lot of requests for a dog run at his park. He said this winter he's planning to implement a place where dogs can run free inside his park.

"I consider us a pet-friendly park," he said. "We do have a leash law, but we have a lot of open space. We also provide the doggie bag disposals and signage throughout our park, and there are no restrictions on dog size or breed. We also

allow dogs inside our yurts."

Mike Gast, vice president of communications for **Kamgrounds of America Inc. in Billings, Mont.**, said KOAs across the country have been busy installing pet playgrounds called Kamp K9s.

KOA has a pet policy in place that ensures RVers and their pets make the most of their stay. Since each KOA campground has its own pet policy, however, it's important for the camper to contact the specific campground they plan to stay at to ask about its pet policy.

For example, some KOAs allow pets in Camping Kabin and some do not.

When arriving at the KOA, RVers must be sure their dog does not show any signs



Scooby Doo Gang at Ocean Lakes Family Campground

of aggression. If they do, campgrounds reserve the right to ask that the camper and their pet leave the premises. A dog should always be on a leash when it is outside its RV or the rental unit to which they are assigned, and the leash should not be longer than six feet. Also, dogs cannot be tied up outside and left alone.

RVers will also want to make sure to keep their dog quiet, as a barking dog could be asked to leave the campground.

Lake Conroe KOA, located in Montgomery, Texas, boasts two dog parks - one more than 1,200 square feet and the other more than 9,000 square feet. "We have put in agility pieces from teeter-totters to window jumps," said Aaron Williamson, general manager. "We incorporated shaded areas so guests can relax with their pets. The larger dog park area is big enough for owners to play catch with their dog. The dog spaces are totally enclosed, so owners have peace of mind their pet can't wander off."

Williamson is proud to say his park is not only pet-friendly, but also pet interactive.

"This is something we are doing to let people know we think their pets are part of their family," he said. "They are more than welcome to be here and have fun with us."

Lake Conroe provides dog waste bags and dog biscuits at check-in, and pet waste stations are located at each dog park.

Becoming Dog Friendly

In order to become a cool place for canines, campground owners have to

obtain pet-related products, and one of the essentials are dog waste bags. **Intelligent Products, Burlington, Ky.**, manufactures a line of pet waste pick-up products and is best known for its Mutt Mitt.

"We have seen a trend that more campgrounds are wanting to become pet-friendly," said Rod Lukey, operations manager. "Campgrounds want to help take care of the pet-waste issue in the most economical way possible. Many campground owners are going for our less expensive product that dispenses one bag at a time. If they put up a simple site with bags available, campers with dogs are happy."

"Our bags have a patented two-ply

bottom with a roomy pouch," Lukey explained. "The bottom has a one-quart capacity pouch. Our two-ply construction provides the end user superior protection."

Intelligent Products now has a number of companies advertising on their "poop bags," Lukey added. "It's really catching on and it is a neat concept. One of the companies that has been advertising is Wet Noses."

The Mutt Mitt is 100% biodegradable and puncture resistant.

DogIPot

"I think there is definitely a trend for campgrounds, RV resorts and even regular resorts becoming more pet friendly," said Dave Canning of **DogIPot, Orlando, Fla.** "Dogs are becoming more and more a part of Americans' everyday life, especially the Baby Boomer generation."

"A lot of businesses are getting the message that if they don't include pets and cater to pet lovers, they are wasting potential for business. It's not only that they are starting to tolerate dogs, it seems they are taking an open arms approach to welcoming dogs."

While talking to many campground owners the last two years at the ARVC Convention, Canning has learned that more park owners have added dog runs, designated dog-friendly areas and installed agility equipment. He believes it is quickly becoming the standard to go beyond simply providing pet waste pick-up products.

The broad product line offered by

DogIPot solves one of the complications that comes with traveling with pets.

"Wherever dogs are included, you are going to need a solution for what to do with their waste," said Canning. "And that is where we come in to help."

The company's products include pet litter pick-up bags that are oxo-biodegradable, and what is called DogValet, a dispenser/disposal container system. The company's new DOGIPOT Pet Station includes a powder-coated lid hinged attached directly to a 10-gallon waste receptacle.

Canning said the DogValet does well in dog runs and dog park areas. Many campground owners provide these valets at check-in. DogIPot encourages park owners to give out a bag or two with a dog bone inside as a friendly reminder to pick up after pets. To turn this into a revenue stream and subsidize the cost of having the bag stations, owners can sell the bags inside their park store.

With consideration to the environment, DogIPot gives green-minded campground owners the assurance that comes from knowing their bags are oxo-biodegradable. All of their products are made with recycled content, allowing pet owners the satisfaction that they are eco-friendly.

"The products also reduce staff time as guests pick up after their own pets," said Canning. "Most dog owners understand it is their obligation to pick up - not someone else's. Our product is an affordable solution that helps park owners welcome dogs and their owners."

Doggie Deposit

Scott Hauk, director of sales for **Doggie Deposit, Eclectic, Ala.**, encourages campground owners to buy environmentally friendly, American-made products. Doggie Deposit is both, and offers campgrounds an economical solution to pet waste. The company manufactures pet waste bags and has partners that manufacture the dispensers and wastebaskets.

Hauk said this year's ARVC InSites convention proved the majority of campgrounds are addressing the issue of pet waste.

"Everyone that came by our booth had either already started addressing the problem or are getting ready to address the problem," he said. "No one wants to run a campground with pet waste on the ground. We are glad to be involved with the solution, and our bags are a cost-effective solution."

Unlike grocery bags that actually protect the contents of dog waste for decades to come, Doggie Deposit's 100% bio-degradable bags break down over a period of just one or two years.

"What we are focused on is helping the campgrounds in an environmentally-friendly way economically," Hauk said. "Since we are American-made we are also able to customize our bags so campgrounds can have their name put on the product. We can do custom signage as well. We're here to do what our customers need. To me, whether they buy our product or someone else's, I strongly urge campgrounds owners to be environmentally-conscious and buy American any time they can." - **Leanne Phillips** ♦