

POOCH PAMPERING WITH PANACHE

BY A.J. MISTRETTA

Somewhere between black-and-white episodes of “Lassie” and Brian on “Family Guy,” the American canine climbed a few rungs in the pecking order. Today’s dogs are more like furry, less whiny children than the pets of the past that were banished to the backyard.

But while people are more concerned about their dogs, they’re also faced with ever-increasing demands on their time. Urban dog owners who can’t run their pup out the way they used to are seeking help from places like Barking Hound Village. In a similar vein, travelers who don’t want to leave their babies at home with a pet sitter or in a sterile veterinary clinic are finding solace in a place that specializes in activity-focused boarding.

Early mornings and late afternoons are the busiest times at Austin’s Barking Hound Village. In a perfect example of controlled chaos, dogs and their owners barrel into the lobby at the beginning of the day, parting ways with kisses and tail wags, only to be reunited after eight hours of human work and dog play. In four years, the South Austin business has become one of the favorite haunts of the local canine set, giving new, less raffish meaning to the term “doggy style.”

Dr. John Hogg launched Barking Hound with a business partner in Atlanta in 1999. “Dogs are like children,” asserts Hogg. He discusses the genesis of the business sitting in the living room of his Westlake home with his partner David Garza, surrounded by their three rescue dogs. “A pet sitter coming over a couple times a day wasn’t cutting it for my dogs when I would leave town. I felt like I was abandoning them.”

So the concept developed for a unique boarding and day care facility that catered to the urban professional. You might call it pooch pampering with panache. The first location opened in the transitional Cheshire Bridge area of Atlanta in a roughly 7,000-square-foot space that had most recently been a haven for hookers. Barking Hound was a rapid success and soon there were four other locations around Central Atlanta catering to every type of dog.

A Doggone Q&A with Barking Hound Village’s Austin and Dallas Location Owner Lisa Jones:

G Style: You were the first employee of Barking Hound. How did you come to work there?

Lisa Jones: I had just moved to Atlanta from Canada to live with my brother who knew John [Hogg] and [business partner] David [York], and knew they needed some help starting BHV. We came to know and trust each other very quickly.

G Style: Tell me about the clients. Who is the core demographic of Barking Hound?

Lisa Jones: Young middle-class singles and couples who travel frequently or work long days that need a safe and comfy place to leave their four-legged children. There are also quite a few families who need us on holidays and during the summer months.

G Style: When you made the decision to come to Texas, was it difficult to leave your life in Atlanta?

Lisa Jones: Jeremy and I wanted a change and had heard so many great things about Austin that the decision was not that difficult, except for leaving our family. We were excited for the challenge of opening a new BHV in Austin, knowing that the eclectic vibe of the people and their dogs would make Barking Hound Village that much more of a great company. We opened Dallas two years after Austin in 2005. Then in early 2007, Jeremy and I were able to purchase the Texas locations from the original owners.

From the start, Barking Hound prided itself on service, becoming known for its staff of caring professionals. Handling special requests – from a specific meal regimen to bedding that the dog is attached to – was the company’s forte. To push people toward more responsible ownership and not disturb the peace at its stores, the company also established a policy of not accepting any dogs that were not spayed or neutered.

“We had a lot of appeal for people whose dogs were part of the family,” Hogg says. “This was something our culture had progressed to. As people move back to the city from the suburbs, their dog is inside and very much part of their lives.”

By 2003, Hogg, a native Texan, decided it was time to return home. He left his radiology practice in Atlanta and started anew in Austin. Branching out with Barking Hound in a city just as rich in dog culture as Atlanta only made sense. The Austin store opened in 2003 with the help of managers-turned-owners Lisa and Jeremy Jones.

“When we started out in Atlanta, this concept was very foreign to people,” Hogg admits. “But our clientele in all of the cities we’re in is very educated and they know what’s good for their dogs. I think they understand the value of what we’re providing.”



G Style: Talk a little about the services provided at the two stores.

Lisa Jones: The two Texas locations are very similar. Both offer private luxury suites for overnight stays as well as day care and baths. Each facility has multiple shaded yard areas for the dogs to run and get their energy out.

G Style: How is the business performing in Austin right now?

Lisa Jones: The sales and clientele have both increased dramatically in the past few years. Austin has taken well to the environment that BHV provides for their dogs.

G Style: It’s no secret that gays and lesbians spend a lot of time and money on their pets. What percentage of your clientele would you estimate is gay or lesbian?

Lisa Jones: Probably 35 percent. The gay and lesbian community has been a crucial part of this business’ success.

G Style: I know that a central focus of the business is giving back. What types of charity work does BHV do here in Austin?

Lisa Jones: We help out many rescue groups in the area, one in particular being Animal Trustees of Austin, which is a no-kill shelter for the animals of the surrounding Austin area. We also participate in the annual Mighty Texas Dog Walk, which supports the seeing- and hearing-service dogs. In addition, we hold small fundraising events at our store occasionally throughout the year. ■