




ADVERTISEMENT

hello, pella days!  our *biggest* event of the year!  **\$250^{OFF}** Your Pella[®] Purchase[®]

1-866-595-5130
Portland Showroom
1605 NW Glisan 

LOCALLY OWNED BY PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP

PortlandLife



News | Opinion | Features | Sports | Sustainable Life | Greenlight Classifieds | Contact Us

Find a story

[Advanced search](#)

Dogs teach new tricks

Smurgy brings pet owners a service, staffers the skills

ENNIFER WILLIS

The Portland Tribune, Jun 19, 2007

Keywords

Any

Writer

Any

Month

Any

Year

Search

Browse archive

[Browse features archive](#)

PortlandTribune
Find a paper

Enter a street name or a 5 digit zip code

Search

Subscribe today!

Breaking News Email Alerts

Features columns

Anne Marie DiStefano

RSS

aking your dog to day care usually just gives your pooch a play date. At Virginia Woof Dog Daycare, your dog could make a real difference in the lives of at-risk Portland people.

Virginia Woof offers 10 weeks of hands-on job training to young men and women between 18 and 24 years old. The downtown day care is owned and operated by the social-service agency Outside In.

“The goal of Outside In is to help homeless youth achieve independent living,” says Executive Director Kathy Oliver. “Employment is key to achieving that goal.”

Since Virginia Woof opened its doors in October 2005, 35 people have completed the program. Jason Chene is one of the participants in training.

“I thought I was just going to get paid to play with these dogs,” Chene, 22, says with a laugh. “I’ve learned a whole lot more than I thought I would have.”



JIM CLARK / PORTLAND TRIBUNE

Working at Virginia Woof Dog Daycare is Kitty Nuñez's first job, and so far she's learned a lot more than just how to play with the canine set. She's considering training to be a dog groomer or a veterinary assistant once she completes the Outside In program.

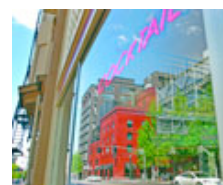
Weather Forecasts
Weather Maps
Weather Radar

▶ Video forecast

SPECIAL SECTIONS



Is housing choice floating out of reach?



Northwest SOURCE



ADVERTISEMENTS

Barbara Ashmun



Liz Colie
Gadberry



The Portland
Tribune
Features feed



LocalNewsDaily

VALLEYTIMES

ClackamasReview

EAST COUNTY NEWS

EstacadaNEWS

NEWS-TIMES

GRESHAM
OUTLOOK

Lake Oswego
Review

Lifestyles

OregonCityNews

Regal Courier

SANDY
POST

THE BEE

Sherwood
Gazette

THE SOUTHWEST COMMUNITY
CONNECTION

TheTimes
TIGARD | TUALATIN | SHERWOOD

West Linn
Tidings

At Virginia Woof, he has studied animal first aid and has gained experience in customer service and office skills.

“Before, I had a lot of talents and a lot of skills, but no direction. Nowhere to go,” Chene says. “Finally, I find myself knowing what I want to do.”

Oliver, whose border collie was the model for the Virginia Woof logo, says homeless youth have a natural affinity for dogs.

“They’re really honest. You know what you get with a dog,” says David Stone, director of Virginia Woof. “They don’t hold grudges, and they don’t play games.”

Oliver describes the “culture shock” many people experience when moving from the streets into the business world, unprepared to understand or meet employer expectations. Virginia Woof arms young people with solid skills – like punctuality and teamwork – that can transfer to any job.

Referred by Outside In and other programs serving at-risk people, trainees work 13 1/2 hours a week, earning \$8 an hour. About 85 percent complete the program.

Kitty Nuñez, 19, had never had a job before. “It was going to be hard to find a job without job experience and training,” she says.

After only a few weeks at Virginia Woof, Nuñez has learned “constant vigilance” and how to “keep a sense of humor.”

Customers see the mission

Virginia Woof provides space for up to 50 dogs, and also offers boarding and private consultation on training and behavioral issues.

“Many people who use our dog day-care services are here to support the idea that we are trying to prevent adult homelessness,” says manager Lorraine Smith, who also is Virginia Woof’s dog behaviorist. “The dogs love the youth. The youth love the dogs.”

Michelle Mueller, who was the architectural designer for Virginia Woof, takes her 2-year-old yellow lab, Nellie, to the day care. She spends \$14 for a half-day, and says the rates are comparable to other facilities.

“There are places much closer to where I live that would be more convenient,” Mueller says. “But I really believe in what Outside In is doing. Every program they’ve looked at, where at-risk kids have worked with dogs, it’s just been such a positive outcome for the kids.”

Nuñez says she’s not much of a people person, but believes dogs are natural icebreakers.

“My co-workers, and David and Lorraine, are really encouraging me to reach out and come out of this shell that I’ve built around myself,” she says. “I find myself greeting customers, even though I’m not in that part of the training yet.”

Love of pets can be tested

The first dog day care in the United States to offer this kind of program, Virginia Woof was recognized in 2006 by the U.S. Department of Labor for providing work-force training to homeless and runaway youths.

Virginia Woof also has support from community donors and supporters, including Meyer Memorial Trust, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation and Gus Van Sant.

Stone says a genuine love of dogs is an important criterion for acceptance into the job training program.

“You may not love dogs as much as you think you do after having 50 dogs running around, going to the bathroom on the floor, trying to fight each other, making a big mess,” Stone says.

Chene laughs when asked about any downside to the Virginia Woof program. “Well, you smell 50 piles of dog poo, and there’s no pooper-scooper,” he says. “That’s what your hands and the gloves and the bags are for.”

Stone admits there are challenges to training at-risk people.

“They’re usually in transitional housing or are currently living on the streets,” Stone says. They face barriers to gainful employment, like unstable home environments or even drug addiction.

“The 20 hours a day they’re not here is completely different from what we give them,” Stone says. “We give them a supportive environment. They’re getting paid. They’re being appreciated. They’re being valued.”

Chene says he works hard, and appreciates the positive feedback he gets from the staff and the guidance they offer when his performance needs help.

“The people here, they genuinely care for you,” he says. “If you’re doing right, they definitely let you know, and they make you feel really good about it.”

As the program draws to a close, Stone says, participants face a tough transition.

“They miss the idea of not being around the dogs,” he says, stressing that they can make their Virginia Woof experience a more permanent reality.

“It’s not just some daydream-land that’s over now,” Stone says. “They can continue that as long as they take the right steps. They’ll be successful.”

About five of the 35 program graduates are still working with animals. Stone says one graduate is currently working at Subway and has earned his GED. Another, who had been living on the streets when he started the program, now has an apartment.

“My idea of success isn’t necessarily making \$45,000 a year working for Microsoft,” Stone says. “Are they getting to a place that’s better than where they were when they came here? If you can say that, then I think that’s success.”

Although Chene hadn’t even heard of dog day care before moving to Portland from Yermo, Calif., last year, he’s looking forward to running a dog day-care facility in the future.

“I’ve been told I’m management material,” Chene says.

Nuñez is considering sticking with pet care, possibly training to be a dog groomer or a veterinary assistant.

“I’m really liking this working-with-animals thing,” she says.

When asked what she would like to tell others about Virginia Woof, Nuñez says, “If they have a dog that needs day care, bring them here. It’s fun.”

Virginia Woof Dog Daycare

What: Day care 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Friday; boarding seven days a week

Where: 1520 W. Burnside St., 503-224-5455

More: www.virginiawoof.com

Copyright 2007 Pamplin Media Group, 6605 S.E. Lake Road, Portland, OR 97222 • 503-226-6397
Pamplin Media Group Privacy Policy

KosmosCentral **Portland Web Design, eCommerce and Marketing** providing quality web development services and custom web solutions for small businesses and large across North America and World Wide.

Looking for graphic design jobs, web design, marketing work or creative **portland jobs**? 52ltd is your source for creative resources in Portland, Oregon.

Search engine marketing, website templates, **portland web design** and website promotion by Webfu // 503.381.5553

New down and fleece north face jackets. The largest selection of **North Face Jackets** available online. Free shipping on orders over \$40.00

USOUTDOOR.com - Shop for **Backpacks** online with free shipping and no sales tax.

See the latest styles of ski jackets and backpacks from **The North Face**.