

every* dog

HAS ITS HOA

**and cat, fish, bird, rabbit,
hamster, snake, etc.*

By Mike Ramsey

Pet-specific amenities and programming are a new priority at community associations amid changing demographics and consumer expectations.



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COME SEPTEMBER, when it’s time again to close the swimming pools at the Broadlands Association near Washington, D.C., the dogs get their day to swim in an amenity usually reserved for humans.

The community sponsors a one-day “Pooch Pool Party” that brings canines and neighbors together while raising money for charity. The splashy event started nearly a decade ago and most recently attracted 100 dogs of all shapes and sizes. Some hung out on the edge of the water; others plunged right in.

Among the most uninhibited participants this past summer was 5-year-old Koa, an 80-pound mix owned by Cathy Bidwell.

“We moved here from Miami, so our dog loves the beach. It was a challenge for us to find water for him to swim in. Just having this once a year is great,” says Bidwell, who served as a volunteer. “It’s nice that the dogs get to come out and play, and you get to meet your neighbors with animals too. It’s a good time.”

Interest from pet owners likewise drove the development of a dog park at Sun City Hilton Head Community Association in South Carolina, an active adult community of nearly 8,000 homes. Added in 2003, the 2.3-acre site has watering stations, a pavilion for shade, wading pools, and plastic bag dispensers for waste cleanup. About 400 dogs romp in the fenced-in area each day.

“It’s a very popular amenity,” says Executive Director Kimberly Burgess, CMCA, AMS, PCAM. “It adds the ability for the owners to take their dogs off leash for a little bit and give them an opportu-

nity to exercise. It also builds community, because those people with common interests—their pets—come together at one particular location.”

Twenty years ago, these kinds of pet perks may have seemed a little off the chain. Today, they are fairly typical examples of how communities—from sprawling homeowners associations to luxury high rises—are fostering increasingly pet-friendly environments.

The trend has gained extra momentum in the past five to 10 years, observers say, as evidenced in part by some of the latest designs for single-family homes. Need a step-in, tiled washing area to clean your dog after a walk outside? No problem. Want a utility room with a specially screened compartment for your cat’s litter box? Check. Meanwhile, developers of the newest apartment and condominium towers are earmarking space for pet spas and “doggie daycare” rooms and using setback roofs as dog runs. “As a general rule, pets are a highly important part of our residents’ households,” says Judy Julison, CMCA,

senior vice president of lifestyle programming for FirstService Residential. “When a builder looks at the amenity plan for a new community, quite often they’re looking at incorporating amenities that are designed for pets.”

WHO LET THE DOGS IN?

If expenditures are any indication, Americans are crazy about their animals. In 2016, they collectively spent nearly \$63 billion on them, mostly for food, veterinarian care, pet insurance, and supplies and services, the American Pet Products Association (APPA) says. That amount has tripled since 1996, when pets generated a reported \$21 billion in spending by their humans, the group says.

Statistics differ on the number of domesticated animals sharing our lives. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) says the number of cats and dogs dropped between 2007 and 2012—from 81.7 million cats (in 37.4 million households) to 74.1 million (36 million households) and from 72.1 million dogs to 69.9 million in 43 million households. The APPA has slightly higher estimates. The pet-industry trade group says there were 85.8 million felines in 42.9 million U.S. households and 77.8 million dogs in 54.4 million homes during a 2015–2016 survey period.

The other kinds of pets most commonly capturing humans’ attention were fish (nearly 60 million in 7.7 million households), birds (8.3 million in 3.7 million homes), and rabbits (3.2 million in 1.4 million households), according to AVMA statistics for 2012.

At the very least, pet ownership has remained stable in the past 40 years, says Hal Herzog, a professor of psychology at Western Carolina University whose study of the relationship between humans and animals is the subject of his book *Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It’s So Hard To Think Straight About Animals*.

“If we’re talking about dogs and cats, people are increasingly personalizing them. In terms of the pet-industry phraseology, it’s the ‘humanization’ of pets,” Herzog says. “The question is why.





DOGGIE DELIGHT. The Sun City Hilton Head dog park is located on 2.24 acres in the heart of the active adult retirement community. The park opened in April 2003 and is visited by hundreds of dogs and their owners daily.

My thinking on that is it's related to changing demography. There are more people living alone now. Marriage is sort of less common. People are having fewer kids, they're getting married later, if they're getting married at all. More people are living longer."

Millennials, the demographic that comprises roughly one-third of the U.S. population, are thought to be especially enthusiastic about their pets. Members of this highly mobile young set are in no rush to have children, and they tend to spend more than other generations on their pets for veterinarian care, toys, and accessories.

"This generation is really focused on their careers," says Robert Scaglione, executive managing director of new business for FirstService Residential. He oversees the management company's luxury-rental arm on the East Coast and says the same pet-friendly strategies also are found in condominiums.

"The millennial market—they want to have pets, they just don't have time for

them," Scaglione says. "Being in a building where I can send my pet to a play group in the afternoon, do all that stuff for me, means when I do come home ... I can play with my dog, and it's all good."

Not everything is perfect. "The internal transportation of the pet is an issue. You like (owners) to use the service elevator, or at least hold the pet. Nobody wants to wear a dark suit in the morning on the way out to work and have a fluffy white dog lean up against them and get dog fur all over them," Scaglione says.

High rises without the latest amenities on-site have developed partnerships with "pet concierge" services whose employees can take the animals to off-site activities. Some of the more unusual offerings Scaglione has heard about are pet massages and pet counseling.

"People are paying top dollar for rents, and we are working harder and harder at programming their lifestyles to accommodate whatever trends are going on, whatever their needs are," he says.

Among the businesses tapping into

the consumer demand is Baroo, a company that caters to apartment buildings and condominiums in Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. It offers services that include pet sitting, dog walking, and grooming. The latter job can be done in a fully equipped, mobile grooming van if there is no dedicated space within the residential complex.

"We have actually seen these types of services being offered in properties all across the spectrum," says Baroo CEO Lindsay Hyde. "That's a really important thing that property developers are understanding: Everybody loves their pets, and everybody wants to be able to give them this great experience."

Hyde and her co-founder were both in the field of childcare. As dog owners themselves, they saw a need for pet tenders who sweat the details, she says.

"We brought all of those same principles that we applied to childcare space into the pet care space," Hyde says. "Things like making sure our providers all have background checks; making sure that

“A lot of people ended up in multifamily apartment communities, condos and such, and the market had to respond by becoming more pet friendly.”

they're trained appropriately to use the equipment consistently so that we're keeping pets safe; making sure we're notifying pet parents of pickups and drop-offs.”

The hospitality industry is credited with helping popularize wider acceptance of pets. In recent years, many hotel and motel chains have allowed dogs and cats to stay in rooms with their owners, although there's a downside to that, too, notes Herzog, the psychology professor: “That dog might make you feel so comfortable and cozy, but if it starts barking like crazy when you're away, it's not necessarily great for the person in the room next to you.”

Some hotels have “ambassador” pets, or mascots, to make guests and their animals feel more welcome. Community associations may be picking up on this concept too.

In the Houston area, two homeowners associations developed by Rise Communities each have their own dog dignitary. One is a Golden Retriever named Soleil, who spends her days at Meridiana, a master-planned community in the early stages of buildout. She takes frequent tours with guests and goes home at night with her caretaker, Marketing Director Lindsey Denson.

Denson says Soleil tends to break the ice with strangers. “If you have a dog, everyone will come and talk to you.”

THE SCOOP ON DOG PARKS

Dog parks or dog runs have become de rigueur at new residential developments, while some older communities have chosen to retrofit existing space.

Sun City Hilton Head was nearly a decade old when the community installed its dog park for a relatively modest sum, says Burgess, the executive director. The cost of maintenance has been minimal because care of the facility is rolled into the landscaping contract.

The biggest issue has centered on how to handle the commingling of small dogs and larger ones. For the more cautious pet owners, there is a designated morning hour for dogs under 25 pounds.

That is followed by a 60-minute period for dogs over 25 pounds.

“Originally, it was all dogs at any time, and some of the residents had concerns with their smaller dogs being run over by the bigger dogs,” Burgess says.

“Over the years, we have looked at other solutions like put-

ting a fence down the middle and having the small dogs on one side and the large dogs on the other. Most people don't really want that.”

The amenity has proven so popular that residents on the other end of the community have asked for their own dog park. “There's no land available to build another dog park, so this will be probably be it,” Burgess says.

A dog park can be built for as little as \$3,000, says Nora VandenBerghe, marketing and sales manager for Dog-On-It Parks in Everett, Wash., which bills itself as the first company to focus exclusively on dog parks. The manufacturer sells everything from play components to pet fountains to replica fire hydrants. The business started in 2007 on the eve of the recession.

“Unfortunately, with so many people losing their homes, they did have to find other types of housing,” VandenBerghe says. “A lot of people ended up in multifamily apartment communities, condos and such, and the market had to respond by becoming more pet friendly.”

Properties have done this in part by installing dog parks, even relatively small ones, she says. Sometimes property owners will repurpose tennis or basketball courts, which typically have fencing in place.

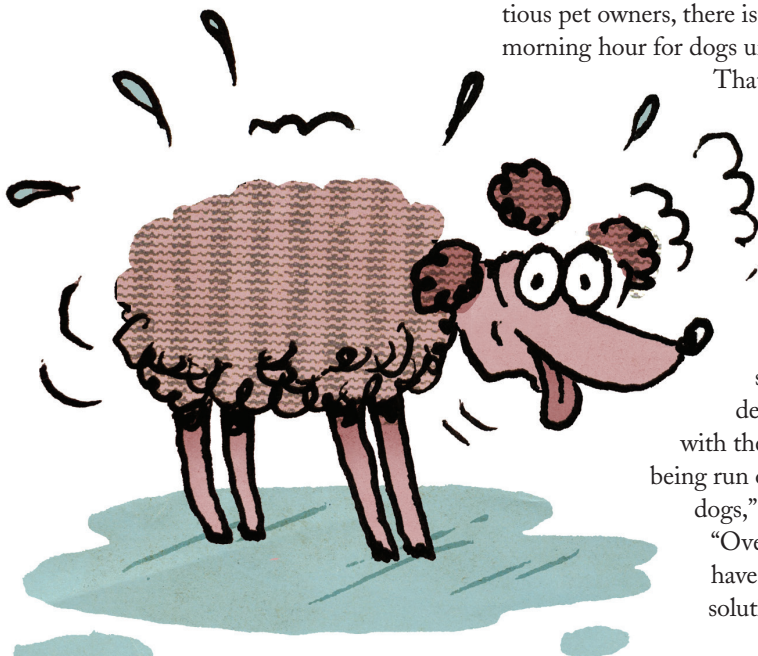
Dog-On-It Parks will advise clients on a variety of planning decisions, including where to build the park. Planners should always tread carefully, VandenBerghe says, because some residents may not like the idea of being next door to a gathering place for dogs. Trees can always help screen the amenity and serve as a noise barrier, she says.

“You want to be respectful of other peoples' homes and access points and things like that,” she says.

Other recommendations from her company: Steer clear of children's playgrounds, to avoid potential conflicts with kids. Provide benches for pet owners to sit and socialize. Because dog urine is corrosive, install park equipment that is made with rust-resistant materials.

Perhaps most importantly, you can't install too many “pickup stations” for dog waste.

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playing BY THE

drools

SUN CITY HILTON HEAD Community Association in South Carolina opened its 2.3-acre dog park in 2003. Dogs and their owners have use of watering stations, a shaded pavilion, wading pools, and plastic bag dispensers for waste cleanup. Residents must use an activity card to access the site. The community posts the following rules:

- Pets shall be taken off the leash when inside the confines of the dog park. This is an off-leash facility. Pet owners shall closely supervise their dogs, be within view, and have a leash in hand at all times. Dogs shall be vaccinated and healthy. Rabies tag shall be worn by animal.
- Each pet owner is responsible for removing the pet's litter from the dog park and disposing of it in designated containers.
- Pets that attack or otherwise present a danger or interfere with the freedom of movement of persons and/or other pets shall constitute a nuisance and shall be removed from the park immediately. The association shall have the right to prohibit from the dog park any animal that constitutes a nuisance.
- Pet owners are legally responsible for any damage or injury inflicted by their pets.
- Female dogs in season are not permitted in the park.
- Pet owners shall immediately fill any holes that their dogs dig.
- Guest dogs are welcomed in the park. Dog owners shall sign in and obey all dog park rules.
- From 9 a.m. until 10 a.m., only small dogs (25 pounds and under) are permitted in the dog park.
- From 10:15 a.m. until 11:15 a.m., only large dogs (more than 25 pounds) are permitted in the dog park.
- All other times are open to all dogs.
- Children under the age of 16 are prohibited from the dog park.
- The laws and ordinances of Beaufort County regarding pets to ensure public safety will be enforced by the community association. Pets shall not create a nuisance as defined in the pet section.

—SUN CITY HILTON HEAD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION



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“The easier it is for people to pick up after their pets, the fewer issues you’re going to have with waste being left on the ground,” VandenBerghe says.

PROGRAMMING PET AMENITIES

Pets also may be the secret weapon where community apathy is concerned.

Managers at Palmetto Dunes Property Owners Association on Hilton Head Island, S.C., have found it challenging to gather residents for social events because only about 20 percent live full time at the resort-style community, says Kiley Fusco, CMCA, AMS, PCAM, director of community relations.

“It’s very hard for us to get these very few owners to participate in events. Oftentimes, we’re trying to drag people out and sending extra invitations,” she says.

Communities are sponsoring “yappy hours,” fitness events for pets, and “look-a-like” contests for owners and their animals.

But residents’ love of animals is a unifying factor. The community had high hopes for its first-ever Pet Appreciation Day in April. Palmetto Dunes was partnering with a local humane society and a dog bakery.

“Almost all (residents) have cats or dogs or some type of pet, and they walk

them on the beach every morning and then they meet at the general store,” Fusco says. “We had one of our owners who was gluing little nail covers to their cats because they didn’t want to declaw them—that’s how much these people care for their pets.”

Julison, the lifestyle programming executive for FirstService Residential, says community associations are pretty much expected to provide activities for pets and their owners these days.

“We view programming as another form of an amenity,” she says. “Perhaps it’s less tangible, but nonetheless it’s an amenity that increases the attractiveness and value of living in the communities we serve. Programming also is an opportunity to nurture social connectivity and enhance the quality of life for our homeowners.”

Some of the most popular activities include events that allow owners to dress up their animals, such as a “Howl-o-ween” parade. Communities also are sponsoring “yappy hours,” fitness events for pets, and “look-a-like” contests for owners and their animals. Also popular, Julison says, are the end-of-summer pool parties for dogs.

The event at Broadlands in Virginia raised \$536 for an animal-welfare charity, says General Manager Sarah Gerstein, CMCA, AMS, PCAM. Placing a bunch of dogs by the water is not without risks, but the community’s insurance company is aware of the program, and managers take precautions, such as having a veterinarian on hand.

At worst, Gerstein says, the occasional overly excited dog may have an “accident” while playing in the water and their owner has to clean up after them.

“It’s a fun event,” she says. “People love their pets, so this provides an opportunity for their pets to interact with each other and for them to play with their dogs.” **CG**

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PUPS IN POOLS. Broadlands Association in Northern Virginia hosts an end-of-summer pool party for dogs. Proceeds go to an animal-welfare charity.

