

## Paws Up for Pets

# Need a top-notch sitter? Professionals outline their services

I recently traveled to New Orleans to speak at a professional pet sitters conference. The auditorium was filled with people dedicated to caring for other people's cats, dogs, birds, chickens, horses, hamsters, and even tortoises and snakes.

My talk focused on giving practical pet first-aid tips and tricks to the attendees, who are often regarded as "aunts" and "uncles" to their clients' cherished pets.

As a profession, pet sitting is not that old. Many credit Patti Moran, the founder of Pet Sitters International, for starting this industry in 1983 when she began charging money for caring for other people's pets in their homes.

Up until then, most people with pets would ask the neighbor kid or a family member to make sure their pets were fed while they left for a business trip or a vacation.

She launched PSI, now a global organization, in 1994. An equally major organization is called the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters.

Speed forward to 2023. Pet sitting is a recognized profession. Why, there is even a National Professional Pet Sitters Week celebrated each

### Where to look

You can find sitters in your area who are licensed, insured, bonded and certified by visiting these two established pet sitting organizations:

- National Association of Professional Pet Sitters — <https://petsitters.org>
- Pet Sitters International — [www.petsit.com](http://www.petsit.com)

And here are the websites of the three locally owned companies cited in this column:

- A Best Friend Pet Sitting Inc. — [www.abestfriendpetsitting.com](http://www.abestfriendpetsitting.com)
- Debra's Dog Den — [www.debrasdogden.com](http://www.debrasdogden.com)
- Jill's Next Door Dog Walking & Pet Services LLC — [www.jillsnextdoor.com](http://www.jillsnextdoor.com)



Debra Kossoff owns Debra's Dog Den in Delray Beach, providing overnight sitting for her clients. 'I found that a dog is most comfortable in his own home,' she says. Photos provided

March. Some professional pet sitting companies staff dozens of employees, and some sitters earn six figures.

As we climb out of the coronavirus mess, many pet parents are finally taking a long cruise or global excursion, but they do not want to leave the care of their pets to just anyone. If you are like me — and I am betting you are — your pets are beloved family members who

unleash unconditional love. My four cats and two dogs are my most priceless assets.

With pets gaining in popularity, the demand for pet caretakers who are insured, licensed, bonded and certified in pet behavior and safety is on the rise.

But what does it take to be a professional pet sitter? And what motivates a person to leave the corporate world to run

a company focused on caring for the pets of others?

For answers, I reached out to a few professional pet sitters in Palm Beach County.

Jill Merjeski operates the award-winning Jill's Next Door Dog Walking & Pet Services LLC in Highland Beach. Debra Kossoff specializes in providing overnight sitting as the solo entrepreneur of Debra's Dog Den in Delray Beach. Denise

Purificato is celebrating her 16th year as owner of A Best Friend Pet Sitting Inc. in Delray Beach.

### A Best Friend Pet Sitting, Delray Beach

Purificato was inspired to start her pet care business when her family had nine pets — two dogs, five cats and two horses — and she had to find someone trustworthy to care

Dr. Jessica Banting



## Welcome Dr. Jessica Banting

A Boynton Beach native, Dr. Banting graduated from the University of Florida's Veterinary School cum laude in 2006, and has practiced veterinary medicine in our area since graduation. She enjoys dermatology, internal medicine, acupuncture, and developing relationships with clients and patients. She shares the passion of providing quality compassionate care for our clients and patients with Dr. Rob Martin and our veterinary teams of Colonial Animal Hospital and Colonial Gateway Veterinary Center.



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for them while the family went on vacation.

She cares for many older pets or ones with medical needs. That means knowing how to properly give medications and recognizing any age-related changes in pets that she can pass on to her clients.

"I've cared for senior pets who had cataracts, have become blind or just have difficulty seeing," she says. "Some older dogs may have difficulty walking, so I will guide them or carry them outside when possible."

One of the rewards of her job is winning trust from her clients.

Purificato says, "I have enjoyed developing a bond of trust with my clients and when they travel, they love the updates and photos I send that show that their animals are comfortable, safe and doing well."

**Jill's Next Door Dog Walking & Pet Services, Highland Beach**

Jill Merjeski left a career as a senior academic adviser at Drexel University in Philadelphia to launch her pet sitting business in Palm Beach County in 2016. Four years later, her company was named Pet Advocate of the Year by Pet Sitters International and last year, her company was tabbed as the Best Palm Beach County Pet Sitters by *The Palm Beach Post*.

"These are big honors, especially considering we started from nothing," says Merjeski. "I am always educating people that my company is part of a professional association that provides continual education and certifications to its members. We are licensed, bonded and we rely on the latest technology to communicate with our clients."

Merjeski uses software called Time to Pet that provides verified GPS-timed visits by her sitters to clients' homes, sends out texts and emails to clients and enables clients to schedule or pay invoices online.

"This software gives clients the peace of mind of knowing where their pets are, who is caring for them during what time and much more," says Merjeski.

Her company also offers a taxi service to shuttle pets to veterinary or grooming appointments or to pick up pets at day cares when their pet parents find themselves working late.

Although she enjoyed her academic career, she loves running a professional pet sitting business.

"The best thing I love about pet sitting is the freedom I have, plus the opportunity to work with animals," says Merjeski. "I create jobs that people love and support."



Jill Merjeski provides verified GPS-timed visits by her sitters to clients' homes. 'We are licensed, bonded and we rely on the latest technology to communicate with our clients,' she says of her company, Jill's Next Door Dog Walking & Pet Services.

**Debra's Dog Den, Delray Beach**

While Merjeski runs a large business, Debra Kossoff prefers being a solo entrepreneur. She focuses strictly on providing overnight sitting to her clients who may be out of town for days or weeks at a time. She is also a certified professional dog trainer who incorporates positive-reinforcement-based techniques.

Kossoff has a master's degree in early childhood education. She was a teacher and worked in hospitals as a certified child life specialist. In many ways, those skills naturally transfer to her pet sitting duties.

"I am a student of learning, and it took me until my late 50s to find my true passion — and that is caring for and working with dogs," says Kossoff.

Her overnights serve as an alternative to boarding dogs.

"I found that a dog is most comfortable in his own home," she says. "My job is to keep the dog feeling comfortable when his owner is away. I also give their people peace of mind while they are away from home. To be successful, you need to be organized, dedicated and adaptable."

As she talks, she lets out a laugh because a client's dog — Bandit, a playful Australian shepherd — is pawing her for attention.

"Dogs are very perceptive of people," she says. "They know safe, dog-loving people. I love my job, and why not? I have a job where I get to laugh, smile and feel loved."

*Arden Moore is an author, speaker and master certified pet first-aid instructor. She hosts a radio show, Arden Moore's Four Legged Life (www.fourleggedlife.com), and the weekly Oh Behave! podcast on PetLifeRadio.com. Learn more by visiting www.ardenmoore.com.*




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**Double Waterfront Estate — Boca Raton**

Beautiful Custom Built home located on a rare "Double Waterfront" gated street with a total of 300 ft. of deepwater. (150 ft. front and 150 ft. back) Features lovely architectural details w/ soaring ceilings w/ wall of glass to bring in beautiful light and views of the water from almost every room. Custom built-in library, Den, coral fireplace, kitchen w/ granite, Wolf & Sub-zero appliances, wine bar, sunny breakfast room, Extensive outdoor living w/80ft covered patio, Newer Roof, 2 covered balconies, dining gazebo, summer kitchen, heated pool and spa, Lush landscaping, stone columns, old Chicago Brick drive and walkways, mosaics, and etched glass create a timeless charm. 2 new docks in front and back, new boat lift, jet ski lift and floating dock for kayaks and paddleboards. A true paradise. **\$5,995,000**



**Delray Beach — Lake Ida**

This Magnificent furnished Estate is poised on nearly 1 Acre of the most unique and beautifully landscaped lots, complete with unique plants and rare trees, winding walking paths and even a putting green. The home features soaring ceilings, a butterfly staircase, a gourmet chef's kitchen w/ custom cabinetry, quartz and marble counters, Wolf oven, Sub-Zero refrigerator and a 7 burner Laganche Gas Stove w/ oven. The living room has a 2 story floor to ceiling window and fireplace. The first floor also features a Media/ Game room, a bedroom & bedroom/office. Upstairs there is a gorgeous oversized Master and stunning bath, a loft and 3 additional bedrooms. Impact glass, full house generator, salt water pool, summer kitchen and a gated entrance to your 3 car garage. **\$5,250,000**



**Gorgeous Townhome with Private Pool — Highland Beach**

This beautifully redone 4 bedroom Townhome is Perfectly located across from the beach and on a wide canal with beautiful Intracoastal views! Features include a large private pool, partial impact glass, beautiful new white tile floors, great open kitchen, downstairs bedroom/ office with a full bath adjoining, Master bedroom with water views and a stunning master bath and walk in closet, 2 more spacious bedrooms upstairs and 2 baths, both with great "East" facing balconies. 2 car garage. **\$2,195,000**



**Port de Mer — Hillsboro Beach**

Enjoy living the Beach Life in this beautiful Oceanside Corner unit on the North End Hillsboro Mile! This unit features an open kitchen with Granite and Stainless-steel appliances, hardwood floors, wet bar, large bedrooms, impact glass, and a Washer & Dryer in the unit. Complex features 2 Pools, garage parking and Pets allowed w/ weight restriction. All of this and blocks to all the fun restaurants, bars and shops of the "Deerfield Curve" **\$549,000**

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