

Paws Up for Pets

Growth of pet parenting has unleashed a pack of innovative services

In 1999, I left the newspaper and book publishing world to cover what's happening in the pet world.

Back then, no one referred to themselves as pet parents. Cat daddies didn't exist. The professional pet sitting industry was still in its infancy. Dogs competing in surfing events or celebrating "yappy hours" were unheard of.

You've come a long way, doggy and kitty. Today, pets are unapologetically regarded as beloved family members by many of us. This growing love for our four-leggers has unleashed innovative pet services. To find examples, you need to look no further than right here in Palm Beach County.

You may spot a state-of-the-art mobile grooming van parked on your street. Inside, dogs are being treated to a sugar cookie spritz.

The next wedding you attend may include the couple's well-mannered dog sporting a canine tux and participating in the ceremony.

Or you may notice a French bulldog being escorted onto your plane by a professional pet concierge expert.

Let's take a closer look at each of these specialized pet services:



ABOVE: Matthew Darnall, owner of Totally Pawsome Pet Transport, with a client. **RIGHT:** A dog is ready to be beautified in a Woofie's mobile grooming van. **Photos provided**

Mobile grooming

Amy Addington left the corporate world 20 years ago to cater to dogs. She and Leslie Barron launched Woofie's, a premium mobile pet service company in Ashburn, Virginia, that offers grooming, pet sitting and dog walking. They eventually franchised, with Woofie's operating in states across the country. One of the newest is here in Delray Beach, where Amy now resides.

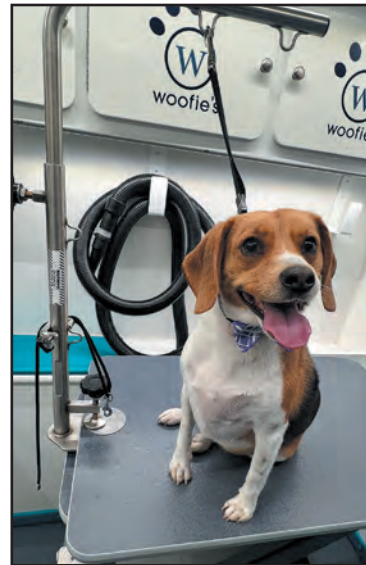
"Back then when we quit our corporate jobs, people thought we were crazy," Addington says. "But we saw this as a way to elevate the pet profession by offering the convenience of mobile services, including grooming, inside a state-of-the-

art mobile van. Our grooming tables feature hydraulic lifts to easily raise and lower a dog."

In some cases, pet parents get to come inside to witness their shaggy, dirty dogs transform into well-manicured, nice-smelling canines.

Liz Gibbs, who sports an animal science degree from Rutgers and worked for a decade at zoos and dog boarding facilities, is the general manager for the Woofie's in Delray Beach. Woofie's has partnered with Pet Vet Connection, a telehealth company that gives clients 24/7 access to veterinarians via video or phone chats.

"With our Pet Vet Connection, any pet under our



Learn more

Here is how to contact the three companies featured in this column:

Woofie's of Delray Beach: www.woofies.com/delray-beach or 561-709-6870

Jill's Next Door Dog Walking and Pet Services: www.jillsnextdoor.com or 561-544-7297

Totally Pawsome Pet Transport: www.tpptsolfo.com or 336-471-7478

about 25 years in the hospitality industry, mainly at country clubs and luxury resorts, but his prime passion has been pets. He has become a certified pet first aid/CPR instructor and volunteers about 500 hours a year helping animals at Tri-County Animal Rescue in Boca Raton.

This has led him to pivot his concierge talents to pets by starting the Totally Pawsome Pet Transport company based in Boca Raton. Playing off the feminine term *nanny*, he offers transport pet services on airplanes, by vehicle for family relocations and even trips to the veterinary clinic and groomers for his pet clients. He refers to his services as Air Manny, Ground Manny and Vet Manny.

"My niche is that I only do solo and VIP trips," Darnall says. "My motto is safely delivering smiles, one pet at a time."

He specializes in chaperoning cats and small dog breeds with door-to-door service to and from major airports within the continental United States, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. On a recent flight he accompanied a senior cat named Meeko, who needs daily thyroid medicine.

Her pet parent was moving from Boca Raton to the Philadelphia area and didn't want Meeko stressed by the movers and from enduring a three-day car ride to Philly, Darnall says. "I picked up Meeko from her house a day before the movers arrived."

Matty also drove a parrot named Simon safely from Coral Springs to the owner's new home in Orlando.

"I am able to transport beyond dogs and cats to include birds and reptiles," he says. "I was expecting Simon to say some words on the drive, but he just made some bird noises, and the trip went smoothly for the both of us."

Arden Moore is an author, speaker and master certified pet first aid instructor. Learn more by visiting www.ardenmoore.com.



care — be it for pet sitting or grooming — has 24/7 access to veterinary care," Gibbs says. "In doing a snout-to-tail inspection on a dog, one of our groomers may find a hot spot or a tick or a lump or bump. Having immediate access to veterinary telehealth services gives our clients that much-needed peace of mind."

Here comes the dog

These days, dogs, cats and other family pets are being invited to once no-pets-allowed events, like lavish weddings. Recognizing this trend motivated Jill Merjeski, owner of Jill's Next Door Dog Walking and Pet Services, to add wedding pet attendant services for her clients.

"We offer different wedding packages, from just doing the pet transport back and forth to the ceremony to getting the pet cleaned, brushed, time to arrive early to sniff and explore the wedding location and working with the wedding photographer to include the pet in the pictures," Merjeski says.

"And, if they want their pet to stay through the reception, we are there for them and we also offer honeymoon pet care options."

Merjeski, from Highland Beach, recognizes that everyone is dressed up for the ceremony. Being in charge of the pet ensures that the wedding becomes memorable and free of pet disruptions.

"One of our first pet wedding services was for a couple with a yellow Labrador named Cody," she says. "I have walked Cody for years, so I knew him, and he knew me. He has a good temperament and wore a bow tie that made everyone's day at the wedding."

Word of Jill's pet wedding services landed her an invitation to be a vendor at a major bridal and wedding expo held in West Palm Beach.

"This new generation getting married is really focusing on their pets as family members, so I see this being a pet service more people will want," she says.

By air, ground or to the vet

Matthew Darnall, who is best known as Matty, is also a pet trend-setter. He spent

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We are delighted to present this week's edition of Coastal Confidential, covering South Florida coastal real estate contract activity from July 13 to July 19, 2024.

Last week, 38 contracts were signed, consistent with the previous week but down 3% from last year. Contract activity for properties under \$1M remained steady, while sales above \$1M saw an 11% decrease year-over-year. Signed contracts from Jupiter to Singer Island tripled compared to the previous year, with over 80% for properties priced under \$1M. The highest-priced contract was for an oceanfront spec house at 1460 S Ocean Boulevard, featuring six bedrooms, a dock, and a pool, listed at \$74.95M.

There were 5 recorded sales from Hypoluxo Island to Gulf Stream, including 1 Osprey Court, a beach block estate closed at \$6.9M, listed by Val Coz of Douglas Elliman. Additionally, 414 Beach Curve on Hypoluxo Island closed at \$1.62M, represented by Patricia Towle of Sotheby's. 18 Eleuthera on Inlet Cay closed for \$2.75M, listed by John Lipscomb with the Corcoran Group. One of my favorite properties for curb appeal, 114 Marlin Drive on McCormick Mile in Ocean Ridge, sold for \$5.25M.

Lastly, an article in The Palm Beach Post cited data from Palm Beach County Property Appraiser Dorothy Jacks, estimating the total value of Palm Beach County real estate to be over \$514 billion, a 10% increase.

Do you have real estate goals?
I'd welcome the opportunity for you to interview me.

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