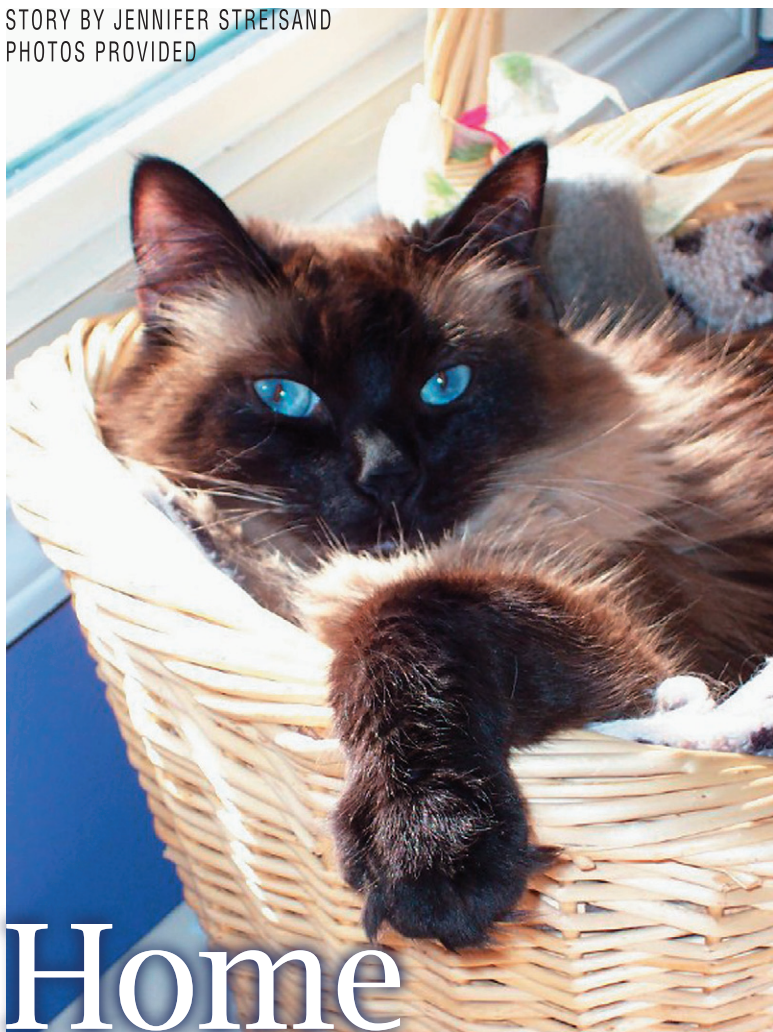


STORY BY JENNIFER STREISAND
PHOTOS PROVIDED



Home away from home

Pet sitters provide
peace of mind for
traveling owners



The dilemma of what to do with your loving pets while you are away is no dilemma at all for the clients of Crittersitters of Lafayette, Inc. Owned and operated by Laura Bartrom and Tracy Walder, Crittersitters will be celebrating its 25th year in business in 2010.

Many people, if they could, would have their pets with them 24/7, but sometimes there is no alternative to leaving them behind. Crittersitters is as much for the client as it is for the pet.

Bartrom and Walder come into their clients' homes to take care of their pets while the client is away on vacation or away from the house during the day. They watch over all varieties of pets.

"With cats, for example, we will spend time making sure that their food is replenished and water is refreshed, and the litter box is cleaned," Walder says. "We do that daily because we like to get a feel for any inconsistencies."

Their care is personalized to the pet, such as providing a little catnip for felines who like to partake and 30-minute walks for dogs who like the exercise—and extra couch time for those who don't.

While the parents are away, the pets will play, but the playtime is not without an assessment, because Bartrom and Walder leave a report card with a grade and description of the pet's behavior.

"I always love Tracy's notes when we get back," says Joanne Troutner, a Lafayette resident. Crittersitters takes care of her two dogs, Suzy and Sami. "We laugh when we walk in and see the grade, and we think, 'grade inflation.'"

Bartrom and Walder are known by their clients for taking care of sick animals as well, and since they have been doing it for a long time, they have gained experience through the years.

"They have helped me take care of a very sick kitty, and they had to feed him with a tube," says Georgene Kennedy of Lafayette. Bartrom and Walder take care of her current pets: Maggie, a dog, and her two cats, Peyton and Stanley. Previously, she and her husband, Bob, also had an African Grey parrot named Greco, and Crittersitters cared for the parrot as well.

Crittersitters charges a base rate of \$14 per 30-minute visit, which is the standard amount of time they spend with a pet, unless the client requests extra time, notes Bartrom. Extra fees are paid for administering medications to the pets and longer stays with the pet, including staying overnight when their schedule allows.

Not to be diminished are the long-term relationships that Bartrom and Walder build with the pets and their clients so that in emergency situations, they are always there for both animal and human.

For example, Eileen Steele was convalescing at home after having surgery last summer, and a group of her friends from around the country chipped in to pay for Bartrom and Walder to take care of her dogs, Hannah and TC, while she was at home recovering.

"My friends knew what would make me the happiest is to be home and know that my pets were being cared for," Steele says. "They knew that was the best thing that they could do for me to help me heal."

Steele enthusiastically recommends Crittersitters to anyone who needs a pet sitter:

"These two women are magnificent," she says. "Not only are they great pet sitters, but they are great human beings, and they are community minded; they are involved and passionate about Lafayette."



Bartrom and Walder have been involved with the Lafayette area since their college days when they were both students of landscape architecture at Purdue University. Their business began when they started house sitting, and eventually professors asked them to watch their pets while they traveled. After college, the two worked at Bennett's Greenhouse, Inc. doing landscape designs, and their pet sitting business took on a life of its own, Bartrom says.

"It was just amazing over the years," she says. "It just started; one person would tell another person, and I guess we are fairly trustworthy and reliable, and we found our own little niche." Today they have more than 200 clients in the Greater Lafayette area.

The other option to care for a

pet while away is to board the animal at a reputable facility, and in fact, some pets enjoy the camaraderie of being around others who are like minded, notes Mary Gray, veterinarian and co-owner of the Greater Lafayette Cat Hospital, whose Web site reads: "All cats, no dogs, Purrrfect!"

"We provide them with things to do like playing with little toys," Gray explains. "Our boarding cages have resting shelves, and it is a sunny room, so they really seem quite content."

Similar to Crittersitters, the staff at the Greater Lafayette Cat Hospital makes a daily assessment of each cat. Gray adds that clients like that the hospital is for cats only.

"There is no dog barking, there is no dog smell, and that makes a difference for a lot of cats."

Another advantage of boarding a pet as opposed to having a pet sitter come to your home is that boarding reduces the chance that the pet—more often a dog—will get away from a pet sitter during a walk or run out of the door, explains Bernard Wulle, co-owner of Crystal Creek Boarding Kennel in Battle Ground. In a separate building,

Crystal Creek also serves as a Tippecanoe County shelter for abandoned and lost animals.

Sometimes pets will run away from a pet sitter because the sitter is unfamiliar to the pet.

"That happens more often than a lot of people think," Wulle says. "During Thanksgiving we ended up with two dogs that were found by the county sheriffs. We were able to track their owners when they got back."

Either way—sitting or boarding—have a plan for the pet and for you, which brings peace of mind and more enjoyment during a vacation.

"I don't have to worry about the dogs. I know they are in good hands," Troutner says. ✽

For more information about pet sitting and boarding, here are some contacts:

- **Crittersitters of Lafayette, Inc.**
Pets1@aol.com • 423-4199
- **Greater Lafayette Cat Hospital**
meowdoctors.com • 449-4195
- **Crystal Creek Boarding Kennel**
Battle Ground
crystalcreekkennel.com • 589-8299

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