

hometown business

The Executive Dog: a canine country club

story and photos
by Rona Trachtenberg

SHELLEY MONIZ is a dog's best friend.

Growing up in Fairhaven, Ms. Moniz helped her grandfather breed winning hunting beagles before going off to the 'big cities' of Boston and Providence to sharpen her marketing, management, sales, customer service and financial skills in corporate America.

In her spare time, Ms. Moniz continued her passion for all things fuzzy by becoming certified in Pet First Aid & CPR and joining the Association of Pet Dog Trainers and the American Boarding Kennel Association. She attended pet related seminars with dog behaviorist Patricia McConnell, Ph.D. and world renowned dog behaviorist Cesar Millan of National Geographic's "The Dog Whisperer" before receiving her dog trainer certification from the Animal Behavioral College.

When Ms. Moniz returned to southeastern Massachusetts she made one of the most important decisions of her business life. "I had always known that I wanted to work with animals," said the 33-year-old petite brunette, "but I never thought that I could make a profitable career out of it until I opened my own business and provided the local community with doggie daycare, grooming, and training."

Ms. Moniz's dream came true on May 1, 2006, when she launched The Executive Dog, Inc. at 105 Scoticut Neck Road. It is located at the intersection of Little Bay Road and Manhattan Avenue—just one mile south of Huttleston Avenue.

"The site was perfect," said Ms. Moniz, who lives a short distance



Shelley Moniz and her "spokesdog" Scuffy welcome you to The Executive Dog.

away. "My family and friends did extensive renovations to the building's interior to create a 2,800-square-foot indoor play facility with interactive canine toys and appropriate seasonal air conditioning and heat. There is a grooming area for cleaning dirty paws and a retail section with dog foods, treats and accessories for sale. The 3,500-square-foot fenced-in exterior space was divided into two sections for large and small dogs to play outdoors during nice weather. It features pools, decks, and shaded umbrella lounging areas."

The Executive Dog functions on the premise that pets are more a part of the family than ever before. Ms. Moniz says, "They have become children to many adults who have to go to work every day. The beloved pooch patiently waits at home all day until its loving master returns for feeding, walking and playing. But, what if the

'parents' are tired after their long day? The eager pet may not get the attention it needs.

"As pack animals, dogs can become lonely, depressed, anxious, and often destructive when left alone. This can lead to a cycle of misunderstanding and frustration for both owners and dogs. Understanding a dog's social, emotional, and physical needs is our specialty. We provide the dog-dog physical outlet that they need and crave as well as the dog-human social stimulation that is necessary for dogs to develop the manners that their owners expect."

Each day there is unlimited opportunity for an enthusiastic romp with other dogs of similar size and energy level that includes a game of fetch, tug of war, frisbee catching, training reinforcement or just hanging out in the indoor/outdoor play areas. Or perhaps what your pup has in

mind is something a little more relaxing like taking a dip in the pool and napping in the sun on the outdoor deck.

The facility is approved for a maximum of 40 dogs, but Ms. Moniz believes that 30 is a more comfortable number. At present she has 15 to 20 male and female dogs that play together every day. She is selective about which dogs she accepts because they have to fit in socially with the core pack. The basic requirements are that the dog has to be at least four months old, have all its injections, have no behavioral issues, and be spayed or neutered after eight months of age. It has to be well-behaved, easy going and want to have fun. It can't be food or toy aggressive or have any separation anxiety when the owner drops it off. "We just want dogs who enjoy hanging out with their friends, play, sleep, eat, and play some more," said Ms. Moniz.

Even more important, though, is



A cool dip on the dog days of summer.

the fact that the dogs must respect Ms. Moniz. "I prefer to take puppies so that I can raise them up here. When a dog is dropped off for the first time, I bring it into the yard first and then bring each 'regular' dog into the yard one at a time for their formal introduction."

Ms. Moniz' day starts at the crack of dawn so that she can welcome her first clients at 7:00 a.m., Monday

through Friday.

Owners feed their dogs at least 30 minutes before arriving so that the canines have enough time to digest their food before all the fun begins.

In the morning, clients drop off their animated pets to the inside facility to reduce the level of happy barking for the neighbors. "It is a bit like five-year-olds coming to kindergarten and all the kids want to talk and play at once," explained Ms. Moniz.

From 9:00 a.m. to noon, the dogs play in the fenced-in yard outside where there is a pool for cooling off and umbrellas for shade. If it is raining, they play indoors. Mandatory siesta time is from noon to 2 p.m. when the dogs take well-deserved naps in the oversized crates. The lights are turned out, relaxing music is played, the phones are set to take messages, and the facility is closed down for the two hours. "For those dogs that get dropped off at 7:00 a.m. and picked

continued on page 21

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Executive Dog. . . *continued from page 7*

up at 7:00 p.m., they really do appreciate a mid-day nap," said Ms. Moniz.

Most dogs get fed by their owners in the morning and evening. But if an owner provides lunch for a pet that is staying the full 12 hours, Ms. Moniz will feed it. The other dogs get a snack. From 2:00 to 7:00 p.m., the dogs go back outside to play in the yard until dark or when their owners come to pick them up.

"This service is perfect for business people who commute to Boston or Providence and can't get back home to let the dog out during the middle of the day," said Ms. Moniz. "And it really works well with teachers' schedules. They drop their pet off at 7:00 a.m., pick up their two legged kids at 3:00 p.m., and then they come for their 'dog-tired' four legged furry family member."

In addition to Fairhaven, clients come from as far away as Marion, Dartmouth and Freetown.

Kerri Miranda, of New Bedford, brings Calli, her one-and-a-half-year-old female English lab, to The Executive Dog. "We both get up at 5 a.m. When I ask Calli if she wants to go to doggie daycare, she jumps up and barks 'yes.' As Calli prepares to exit the facility at the end of the day, she gives 'goodbye' licks to all her dog friends through the fence before she feels comfortable leaving."

Lynda Francis, of Mattapoissett,

can't say enough good things about Ms. Moniz and The Executive Dog. "I tell strangers in the supermarket what a great experience it is for my sweet dog Riley. Right now he is going two days a week and looks forward to the warm weather to jump in the pool. I also have him groomed by Shelley and she does a wonderful job. You can tell when a person truly loves animals and that comes across right away with Shelley and I really think the dogs can tell, as well."

Dr. Louis P. Kenyon and Claudette Azar-Kenyon, of Dartmouth, have been using The Executive Dog daycare service for their AKC Cairn Terrier, "Sofia's Summer Sandpiper" (or just "Piper") since September of 2006. "We adopted Piper at the age of ten weeks and immediately visited Dr. Jay Gould, at Mattapoissett Animal Hospital," said Ms. Azar-Kenyon. "We shared our concerns about leaving our new puppy at home for long periods of time while we were at work and that over-kenneling might create house training problems or have a negative affect on teaching our dog good socialization skills. Dr. Gould reminded us that dogs are pack animals and need interaction. He advised us to visit with Shelley Moniz.

"I took Dr. Gould's advice and stopped in for an unannounced visit with Shelley one weekday when I was off. I was very pleased with her daycare; it is clean, bright and, most importantly, safe, both indoor and

continued on page 25

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continued from page 21

outdoors. I went armed with many questions but I was comfortable with Shelley right from the start. My first impression was that she is very competent. She really has control over the dogs. She's very professional, clearly well-trained, and you can tell she has an animal-lover's heart—these qualities were all important to me."

The Executive Dog, Inc. provides three services: daycare, grooming, and training. New clients have to complete three safety documents (Dog Waiver, Daycare Application, and Veterinary Form) before being considered. Private training is offered by Ruth Smiler, of Manners for Life Dog Training, who has her own class registration form that clients must complete. These forms can be found online, at www.executivedog.com.

All dogs have to be current on their Bordatella (Kennel Cough) vaccinations to attend The Executive Dog.

If a dog needs medications, Ms. Moniz will administer them at no additional charge. But, any dog that is sick will be sent home immediately or confined to a separate area until it is picked up.

Despite the fact that the dogs are grouped by same size and personality type, the day care setting sometimes fosters energetic play, which may result in minor scrapes or scratches. If a dog is injured during play, Ms. Moniz will initially treat it

herself because she is certified in Pet First Aid and CPR. But for anything more serious than a scratch or bump, she will have the dog transported to a local veterinarian, with whom she has a good business relationship.

Your pet can play at The Executive Dog from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. for \$20 a day. A five day package costs \$90, saving 10 percent off the daily rate. A 10-day package costs \$170 and a 20-day package costs \$320. If one family has two dogs, the second pet gets half off the rates.

Basic Grooming Services, including shampoo and conditioning treatment, hand drying, nail trimming and ear cleaning, cost \$25 for a dog under 25 pounds and \$30 for a dog over 25 pounds. More complicated cuts range in price depending on the size and coat type of the dog.

Ms. Moniz accepts MasterCard, Visa, American Express, checks and cash. She asks that all

visitors park at the Little Bay Road entrance, and not on Scoticut Neck Road.

Appointments and reservations can be made by calling or faxing (508) 990-7070 or via e-mail contact@executivedog.com.

"I love what I am doing," concluded Ms. Moniz. "This is the best job in the world. Now that I am doing this, I don't want to do anything else." ❖

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