

Putting the “Care” in Pet Care

By **ASHLEY CLAIRE SIMPSON** - January 3, 2018



Photo by Emily Korff, Veralana Photography

Nearly 80 million households in America include a pet, according to a 2016 American Pet Products of America (APPA) survey. It’s no wonder that these canine, feline and other companions are so common in families: from their loyalty to their ability to make us feel safe and secure, our furry, scaly or feathery family members enhance our lives in countless ways.

Leaving these loved ones in another person’s care can be tough – both for owner and animal. It can be a challenge to find caretakers who will nurture them the way you would, until they’re back in your arms.

Karen Rosenberg, the founder and owner of McLean’s KSR Pet Care, LLC, knows the importance of qualified, loving pet care. KSR provides personalized, in-home pet care and other remote services for animals who require training or even a little extra TLC.

“KSR Pet Care’s mission is to consistently provide dedicated personable professional pet care,” Rosenberg, who established the business in 2008, said. “All my sitters are mature and in close contact with the rest of the team, their office and the clients. Communication is at its best. As an employer we also pay well and offer benefits like health care because we want our sitters to think of their job as a career, not a side job. We have the right attitude, experience and common sense to provide excellence in pet care.”

Today, KSR serves 1,200 pets, who collectively belong to 467 active clients.

“We offer an all-inclusive package of in-home services including dog walking, pet sitting, overnights, house and plant care, pet taxi and dog training—which includes both group classes and private lessons,” Rosenberg said. “We work with dogs, cats, birds, chickens and other small and exotic animals.”

All roads lead to the care and keeping of animals.

As a child in Belgium, Rosenberg didn’t grow up in a house full of pets. Still, she knew that her life’s roadmap would at some point involve taking in animals of her own.

“I constantly begged my parents for a dog, starting when I was around nine years old, but my

parents wouldn't agree," Rosenberg recalled. "They didn't think I was ready to take full responsibility at that point, which was true. So, I ended up in the beginning with fish and birds, and later on, cats. I did have two imaginary dogs: one was a Shepherd, the other a Dachshund. I finally got my first live dog with my husband in 2006."

While it's common for many immigrants to struggle in finding a place while adjusting to a new country, Rosenberg didn't waste any time pursuing her dream right after settling in the United States from Belgium.

"While I was waiting for my work visa, I volunteered for a rescue, the Virginia German Shepherd Rescue," Rosenberg said. "My husband and I fostered over 20 dogs and placed them in new homes. I learned a lot, but it was also emotionally draining since a lot of these dogs were very ill or had bad behavior issues and needed training before going to a new home."

Rosenberg's brief foray into traditional business helped her realize that, despite the emotional toll and hard work it required, animal care was indeed her calling.

"I worked corporate for a little while after obtaining my work visa, but found that my passion was elsewhere," she said. "At the same time, I had a friend who had to quit her pet care business because she developed very bad allergies. This brought me to starting my own business, KSR Pet Care LLC, on November 17th, 2008."

Photo By Sweet Lime Portrait Design, Family Photography, Baby Photography, Maternity Photography, Business Photography, Corporate Photography

In developing KSR Pet Care, Rosenberg knew from the outset that she would only hire like-minded people who shared her mission to care for client animals as their own.

Her business model involves strictly “mature”, permanent staff caring for the pets. Rosenberg is very selective when hiring, putting each potential new team member through an intensive application process, a double interview, and criminal background and professional reference checks. After the selected employees begin working, Rosenberg also closely follows up with both sitters and office staff.

“I train my office staff myself,” she said. “They are passionate about animals and come from a background in customer service, and they all have college degrees. The field staff members are trained on the job by shadowing more experienced pet sitters.”

Rosenberg earned both undergraduate and graduate degrees in Communications and Business Administration, respectively, from reputable universities in her native Belgium.

With four beloved pets of her own at home, Rosenberg understands the importance of keeping all animals as safe as possible. There is a process for and safeguards against every potential dangerous situation.

First and foremost, she insists that KSR staff is always ready at a moment's notice to perform life-saving procedures on an animal. All pet sitters are CPR and pet First Aid certified. Some of them are even certified to administer subcutaneous fluids.

"We have an employee handbook and orientation which bring the initial knowledge of what being a professional pet sitter or dog walker is all about," she said. "Both our office staff and the field team are CPR certified and must take pet First Aid courses before starting the job. Pet CPR skills are crucial when you have a pet sitting business. All my team members follow the class, including my office staff. 99 percent of the time, all is well and it won't be required, but you need to be prepared for that one percent."

Rosenberg also keeps a pet's emotional health at the center of her practice. She opened KSR as a place where pets would feel at home even with their owners out of the house. As the business grows, this focus remains key. She recognizes that, much like humans, animals all have different needs – needs that KSR is ready and able to meet.

"An option like KSR is important because cats and a lot of dogs are deeply attached to the home environment and get stressed out when being dropped off for boarding," Rosenberg explained. "Especially senior dogs and dogs with owners who are home a lot, it is better to get an in-home service. In-home care is also necessary for young puppies who are not up-to-date on shots, because they cannot be dropped off at a boarding facility. With our overnight service where sitters spend the evening and night, we in fact copy the routine that the owner has with their pets which gives a very high comfort level to the pet. We are there for breakfast, for lunch, for dinner and late night. We offer companionship, food, fresh water and love just like their owners do. Above all, we offer a routine that is similar to what they're used to which makes them happy, relaxed and content."

As pet care has changed over the years, KSR has grown exponentially.

Once exclusively active within McLean, KSR now provides pet care in North-Arlington, McLean, Dunn Loring, Falls Church, Fairfax, Merrifield, Oakton, Tyson's Corner and Vienna. Soon, the business will also have presence in Annandale, Great Falls and Springfield.

In addition to a larger service area, KSR continues to add to its list of service offerings.

"We've added on dog training, for example," Rosenberg said "We have two certified dog trainers on staff and will add on a third soon. They offer private lessons, Walk and Train sessions, and

also group classes at the Kriser Pet stores in Fairfax and Vienna on the weekends.”

Rosenberg’s business background and adaptive nature has helped KSR accommodate the changes in overall owner expectations of pet care over the last decade.

“It is amazing how clients in my area want to pamper their pets with overnights and up to four visits a day,” she said. Don’t get me wrong, pets need a lot of attention and care when their owners leave town. I book the same services for my own pets when I go away and can’t bring my animals with me! It is not cheap and the prices have gone up since I started, but the quality of service has also increased by rewarding my staff more with raises, benefits and bonuses. A happy team makes happy clients.”

And, KSR certainly has happy clients.

“Every two years, Washingtonian magazine does a pet provider survey and we have won top honors in 2011, 2013 and 2016,” she said. “We also have excellent references, testimonials and reviews.

Today, 12 years after bringing her first permanent pet home, Rosenberg has expanded her family quite considerably.

She’s since rescued four pets who are now invaluable members of the Rosenberg family.

“There is Lexie, a petite, sable German Shepherd, and almost-six-year-old Jiffie, a Golden Lab mix,” she said. “Cody is a ten-year-old Chihuahua, and, lastly, there is Harry who is a Russian Blue mix of almost 12. I love them all!”

As for KSR Pet Care, Rosenberg hopes to improve upon what she is currently doing for her existing network.

“I want to continue to grow my team base and client base but that does not necessarily mean expanding geographically,” she said. “I want the team to thrive and excel in our current state and situation.”

For more information on KSR Pet Care, visit ksrpetcare.com.

To find weekend dog training classes, visit ksrpetcare.com/classregistration.

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Ashley Claire Simpson is a Marketing Communications Specialist for a local military association, but her real passion is freelance writing for a number of publications, including Fairfax/Alexandria Woman. She has been writing features and human interest pieces since her college newspaper days at the University of Virginia, where she graduated in 2008. Ashley has lived in the D.C.-metropolitan area for most of her life and always relishes the opportunity to learn and write about so many inspirational local women who make a difference in the community – and in the world at large.