

Pets

According to *Peanuts* cartoonist Charles Schulz, “Happiness is a warm puppy.” We agree. It’s also a warm kitty, a happy pig, a galloping horse or singing bird, to name a few of the many animals we have in our lives. Pet-lovers, we remind you, as always, to spay and neuter, and to check out Greenhill, First Avenue or any of the many caring rescues in Lane County when looking to add another non-human animal to your family. You can find rescues and available pets at PetFinder.com and find pets of the week here in *EW*’s pages. Don’t forget to have a collar and license on your beastie to make sure he finds the way back again, should he ever stray — because happiness for our domestic pets means a secure home, whatever form that may take, with food, care and love.

Walk This Way

LOCAL ANIMAL LOVERS TAKE THE CAREER PATH LESS TRAVELED *by Sarah Hagy*



ALICIA JOHNSON WALKS
HER CLIENTS’ DOGS ON HER
WOODED PROPERTY
PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

After spending 30 stressful years working as a computer technician, Steve Walker found himself in his early sixties and looking for a career change that would facilitate both his retirement and his golfing hobby. Walker chose dog walking. A year and a half later and Walker’s “Top Dog” offers dog walking, pet sitting, vacation visits, pet transportation and errand running. The business has grown to the point that he occasionally turns down jobs to retain his partial retirement.

“One of the big parts of the job is that the animals love me,” Walker says. “I enjoy working with dogs, and the dogs enjoy having me, so it’s really beneficial for both of us.”

Delilah, a mix of Great Dane and hound, is the first dog he ever walked, when she was just four months old. “She was big when I met her and she is bigger now,” Walker says. “She is just a sweetheart and I kind of taught her to walk, so I am proud of that.”

Walker has about five dogs that he walks, separately, several times a week. He charges \$16 per half hour, but lowers the price for regulars and offers 50 percent discounts for new clients and referrals. Walker makes \$800-\$1,000 a month and always makes it home at night to his 8-year-old Tibetan terrier, Toby. He is insured and bonded as well as certified in dog and cat first-aid. Check topdogeugene.com.

As a single parent, Alicia Johnson knew she needed a job with flexibility. She found a way to enjoy the great outdoors and gain a pack of furry friends along the way. Her nontraditional dog-walking business lets her take a pack of canines out hiking on her wooded property for a couple hours. The dogs are free to roam but generally stay in a pack and all get along.

Her regulars range from 10 months to 15 years old, and Johnson keeps an eye on any stragglers. “It’s kind of like herding sheep,” she laughs. Johnson charges \$18 per hike, and she has made a successful living out of her dog hikes.

“My business has definitely evolved in the last 13 years,” Johnson says. “This isn’t exactly how I started, and I had no idea that it would ever grow to be what it is. I mean it’s really freaking amazing and awesome. I realize how fortunate I am to be doing what I’m doing and how lucky I am.” Email dogpile.aj@gmail.com.

Dogs, cats, pigeons, fish, lizards, turtles — you name it and Paws ’N Go has done it according to owner Diane Allen, who started her pet-sitting business three years ago. She remembers a conversation she had with her husband, Terry Allen, when she wanted to change jobs. He said, “Well you like dogs, walk dogs,” and she thought, “Wow, that’s a really good idea.”

Allen spends her time committed to caring for a wide array of pets. For vacation clients, Allen visits several times a day to care for the animals, and she sends text messages and photo updates to owners. Although her success and commitment led to \$25,000 in earnings last year, Allen says, “I am not in it for the money. I’m in it just because I love dogs.”

When an animal is boarded at her house it is treated with the same affectionate familiarity as her 5-year-old Boston terrier, Molly. If they are at the house they get the whole red-carpet treatment: snuggles on the sofa, free rein in the backyard, regular walks and, anywhere Allen goes, they go too. “It’s really corny, but I love all these dogs; they are all good, sweet dogs.”

Allen leaves clients a checklist detailing what work was done during each visit and comments on the pets, an invoice with the bill and a self-addressed envelope for payment. Paws ’N Go charges \$14 per half hour, \$22 per hour, \$30 overnight and is insured and bonded. Email diane@pawsngo.net.

According to the National Association of Petsitters, \$16 a visit is the national average for petsitters. A dog walker or petsitter making five visits a day five days a week would make about \$400 a week. Increase that to eight visits a day and a motivated pet lover could make around \$30,000 a year — not a bad income for a job in the fresh air and furry company. ■