

SMALL BUSINESS

Pool exercise helps dogs regain damaged mobility

By Val Previsk

Enquirer contributor

ROSELAWN – Jaye and Vince Reckers' Saint Bernard, Joey, could barely walk before they found Sandra Hodges and K9 Waves pet spa.

But after a few months of regular swimming exercise, Joey could run and play, happily romping across the Reckers' back yard in Delhi Township.

"It was an amazing change," Jaye Recker says.

Hodges is a certified canine aquatic therapist who opened pet spa K9 Waves in January. The business, in a renovated building she owned, is a dream come true for the retired business administrator with the University of Cincinnati.

"I'm not a sit-around kind of person," Hodges says. "I love animals, and I knew I wanted to work with them when I retired. I also love the water, so it was a perfect combination."

K9 Waves offers warm-water swimming and massage therapy as a way to give inactive pets a chance to regain mobility and fitness. Hodges especially enjoys working with sick and handicapped dogs, which has become a specialty.

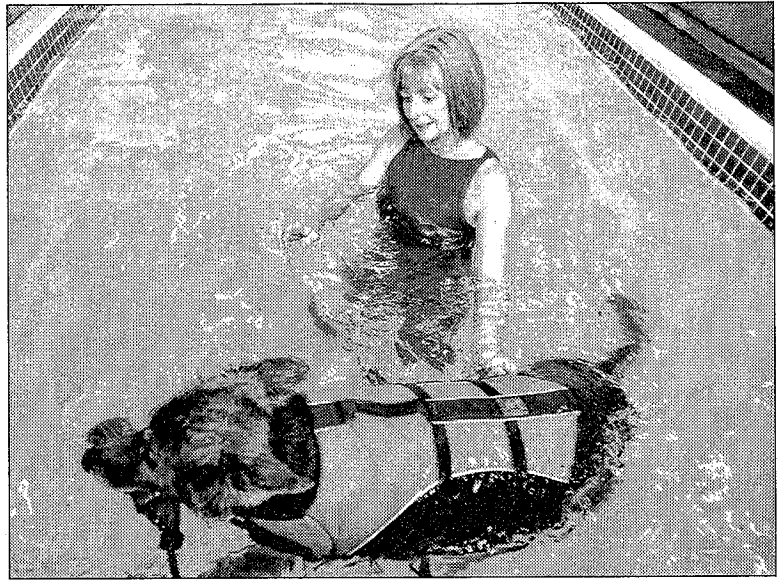
She had seen the benefits of water exercise several years ago when a longtime pet German Shepherd was suffering immobility related to cancer. Water therapy, she says, helped extend her dog's life.

At K9 Waves, animals swim or are held and massaged in a specially built 20-by-10-foot pool where the water is a warm 88 to 94 degrees. The decking surrounding the pool area is covered in rubber mats to avoid slips, and towels are provided.

A 15-minute, one-on-one swimming session with Hodges runs \$20. Thirty minutes is \$35, and 45 minutes is \$50. Hodges now has about 10 clients. She hopes to eventually have 50 to 60.

"I love working with animals that are in need," she says. "It's very gratifying helping disabled dogs."

Hodges says pet owners have told her that their animals went off medication or avoided surgery after spending time with regular swimming exercise. Pain frequently keeps sick or handi-



The Enquirer/Gary Landers

Sandra Hodges, owner of K9 Waves, an aquatic fitness spa for dogs, works with Keno, and 11-year-old German shepherd with degenerative joint disease. Keno is the pet of Vikki Johnston of West Chester.

K9 Waves

Address: 7637 Production Drive, Roselawn 45237

Phone: 513-314-0685

Website: www.k9waves.abmp.com

Owner: Sandra Hodges

Notable: Hodges has offered swimming sessions at no cost to injured animals in the care of rescue services.

capped pets sedentary, which only increases their problems, she says. Just once or twice a week in the pool for short periods can make a big difference in how an animal feels because it strengthens the pet's muscles again.

Jeffrey Werwa, a veterinarian with a private practice in Sycamore Township, refers pet owners to K9 Waves. He says that rehabilitative exercise is one of the most helpful therapies a pet owner can offer a pet.

"If you don't work the joints things get worse," he says of ailments such as hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, surgical scars and injuries. "Alternative therapies play a huge role in a pet's care, just like they do with people. Swimming puts less pressure on joints, and so it's very important."

Hodges says she sees a healthy market for spa services in this area as pet owners are more willing than ever to seek out specialized care such as swimming and massage. While spas such as hers are still somewhat rare in the Midwest, they are common on both the West and East coasts, she says. She received her training at a spa in Seattle, Wash.

Reckers says she doesn't consider the cost to be extravagant for the joy it's brought her family or the relief it's brought Joey, who suffered from a bone spur on his spine.

"People who are truly dog enthusiasts will do things for their dogs that they might not even do for themselves," she says. "The cost of the spa swimming was very reasonable, and it was worth every penny."

Hodges says she enjoys working with pet owners such as the Reckers who are as devoted to their animals as she is to her own.

"So many of us underestimate the bond people have with their pets," she says. "There is a strong emotional connection."

"I'm never going to get rich doing this, but it's what I love to do."

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