

Book Your Dog's Five-Star Getaway

The Lodge at New Tampa redefines canine luxury with a facility more like a resort than a kennel.

By Rory Crump

Ever have that anxious moment while lounging on a Caribbean beach, wondering if your Labradoodle is safe and sound at the local kennel? Check Buster into [The Lodge at New Tampa](#) – 15403 Morris Bridge Road – and rest easy.

The one-of-a-kind, Ritz-Carlton for dogs is owned and operated by New Tampa residents Kenneth Judson, a veterinarian with 35 years of small-animal practice, and his wife, Carla, a hands-on veteran of the kennel business.

“We’ve dedicated our lives to the well-being and care of animals,” the husband said.

So soak up the rays, turn up your iPod, and find comfort in knowing your pet is being cared for by seasoned professionals, and is probably having a better time than you.

The Judsons’ pet project was four years – and a lot of hurdles - in the making. A blueprint for five-star canine success did not exist. A little dogged persistence and buckets of creativity were required to complete the rustic and refined facility.

So the Judson family, now busy with another booming summer, leaned on “lessons learned through the years, to create a facility second-to-none,” Kenneth Judson said.

And, The Lodge’s brisk repeat business supports his claim. Take one of the full-facility tours available to the public and see for yourself. Or, drop in on their ¼-acre, oak-lined dog park – open to the public with a signed waiver – for some “interactive, athletic play” and let your dog decide.

Since opening their doors in May 2009, 3,500 “guests” have been pampered by the same amenities and comforts found in a, well, human resort. From the stone fireplace to the French antiques, every detail of The Lodge was designed to make your pet feel at home. The Judsons handpicked many of the furnishings from antique-rich Sonoma, California.

The décor, according to the husband, is “relaxing and calming for the animals; it almost resembles a house.”

That explains the mood music and Animal Planet oozing from the rooms. And if your dog prefers ESPN, The Lodge can accommodate.

Your nose will confirm this place is different. More aromatherapy than doghouse, The Lodge's entire facility smells clean and fresh. The air is filtered and purified, guarding against any airborne contaminants.

The Judsons' daughters, Kathryn and Natalee, help manage the Northwest-lodge-inspired, three-acre facility, complete with air-conditioned suites, flat-screen TVs and a swimming pool.

Yes, a swimming pool. Just for the dogs.

Like a hotel, The Lodge offers rooms with different touches and dimensions. The poshest single room – the Large Luxury Suite – is 54 square feet and furnished with designer pillow beds, elevated food bowls, HD-TV and optional Web cams.

All rooms include a private, outdoor lanai with turf flooring. The Large Luxury Suite rate is \$44 a night, per dog, with discounts for multiple occupants. The Lodge features less expensive digs, but the Judsons have found the larger, more luxurious rooms to be more in-demand.

Cats have their place, too. The Cattery – a tidy collection of “multi-level condominiums” – includes a screened-in, outdoor lanai, an exercise room and plenty of sunshine.

Canine or feline, The Lodge “strives to give a one-on-one positive experience,” Kenneth Judson said.

The Lodge also offers a cutting-edge grooming service. Giant, walk-in showers - the envy of any master bathroom - anchor the spa-like experience. The Hydro-Surge bathing unit eliminates dry flakes and loose hair, massaging your pet in a relaxed setting. Even powerhouse frames are safely elevated by The Lodge's hydraulic lift.

Pro groomers orchestrate the natural shampoos, fluff dries, ear and nose treatments, and special requests with expert precision. Grooming services start at \$30.

Now check your own all-inclusive resort itinerary. Bet the accommodations and extras don't compete.

The Lodge's reputation is spreading far and wide, the Judsons said, with customers arriving from the Carolinas and Texas. Local? Take advantage of The Lodge's daycare service. Your dog will swim, play, and dine in style, making new friends in the process.

The Lodge is truly a family affair. The business is open seven days a week, and after a short dinner break the Judson family returns for a two-hour “play session” with the dogs. Keeping your pet on a schedule, just like home.

Staying true to their mission requires a huge commitment, and the couple feels fortunate to have their children both involved in the business and passionate about the animals. “They’re really good kids,” Kenneth Judson said.

There are no plans for expanding locations - or franchising - and the Judsons would like to keep the business in the family.

So enjoy your trip, confident your barking kids are on vacation, too.