

Energetic dogs treated to Four Paws Adventures

Business owner's services include walks, park trips

By Patricia Bathurst
SPECIAL FOR THE REPUBLIC

Melanie Barnes was hiking with her pup, Pita, when she had an epiphany based on her own experience with a high-energy dog.

"She's still energetic, but as a pup, she was extremely high-energy. And I thought, 'I bet a lot of people don't have time to exercise their dogs.'"

So energetic, in fact that Pita's name came from Barnes' boyfriend, who called the super-energetic, mixed-breed puppy a "pain in the ___" when she joined the household.

The American Veterinary Medical Association recommends a minimum of 60 minutes of exercise daily to keep

Four Paws Adventures

Based in Mesa, services currently in Ahwatukee, Chandler, Gilbert. 602-617-6419
www.fourpawsadventures.com

Employees: Just Melanie Barnes right now, but by summer she hopes to add at least one or two contractors to offer services in the northwest Valley and Scottsdale.

Stats: Initial investment of about \$8,000; about 30 steady clients; 90-minute excursions are \$30 with an eight-excursion

discount for \$210.

Quote: "Oh, the dogs! They cheer me up even on a bad day. They're waiting for me at the door, and they're so happy to see me! It beats going to an office with a bunch of other grumpy people," she said.

Fun fact: Smaller dogs — like Jack Russell terriers — may need more exercise than some larger animals. The best exercise for dogs is purposeful activity that increases the dog's ability to live happily among humans, Barnes said.

high-energy dogs healthy and happy.

Barnes, who was working as an account representative for a Phoenix machine shop, had been hoping to make a break and start her own business.

While she pondered, she continued the pet-sitting she'd done for years. She knew, however, that a full-time pet-sitting

business needs to operate on a 24/7 basis to be successful.

"I'd been saving money, too, to open a business. The thing was, I wanted something I could do during normal business hours.

"I found a book and a mentor (a trainer based in Colorado) and spent a little over six months figuring out how to



NICK OZA/ARIZONA BUSINESS GAZETTE

Melanie Barnes of Four Paws Adventures takes care of her canine clients with trips to Cosmo Dog Park in Gilbert.

set up a business focused on helping pet owners be sure their dogs are getting all the exercise they really need to be as healthy as possible," Barnes said.

She also invested time and money in outfitting "The Dog Bus," a climate-controlled van

equipped with extra toys, towels and four large crates to ensure safe transport for any size pooch.

Her initial marketing focused on word-of-mouth from her pet-sitting clients and a fo-

See **DOGS** Page 22

Experience with her high-energy dog helped owner launch business

DOGS

Continued from Page 4

used flyer-distribution to groomers, pet stores and trainers. She also used sticky notes and organized a Web site describing her services.

Barnes' services go far beyond a walk around the block. Instead, she offers dog owners an opportunity to send their pets on local excursions to a dog park or along the trails at

selected local parks and preserves.

"I pick 'em up, take 'em out and do my best to tire 'em out," she said.

All outings last about an hour and half, not including pick-up and drop-off time. Excursions to the dog park always involve lots of Frisbee or ball playing, as well as racing and jumping.

"I like to be interactive with the dogs in the park," she said.

"They're there to get exercise, and sometimes their favorite dog to play with is the person."

Cosmo Dog Park is a favorite destination, Barnes said, in part because it is one of the larger in the region, but especially because it features a lake.

"Dogs can cool off, especially in warmer weather," she said.

"The only problem last year was that they closed for part of July and all of August, just

when dogs need to be able to cool off after exercise."

On hikes, summer or not, she carries at least 150 ounces of water in her backpack, along with addition spritzer bottles to make certain the dogs stay cool. She carries lots of towels in the bus so that all dogs return clean and dry.

Barnes' other secret is a large supply of small, low-calorie training treats. "I don't do training," Barnes said, "but

they do need to 'sit' and 'stay' sometimes."

For owners, that's one of the most popular services Barnes provides. That's because sit and stay are for the photos that make up the daily updates to the online photo gallery documenting all the fun the dogs have, while their owners are at work.

Reach the writer at
www.writinginaz.com.