



Michael and Michelle Dougherty, with their Cavalier spaniel Fancy, opened Windsong Pet Resort in January. They offer a pampering vacation experience for dogs and cats while their owners are out of town. Amenities include TV, massages and room service. Lillian Cox photos

Posh for pets

Resort pampers furry friends the way humans would like to be

By Lillian Cox
SPECIAL TO TODAY'S LOCAL NEWS

The Windsong Pet Resort is so exclusive that owners Michelle and Michael Dougherty compare it to the luxury spa up the road.

The Doughertys provide shuttle service for their furry clients to and from the posh Golden Door Fitness Resort.

While his guardian indulges in an herbal wrap, Fido can relax with a massage or aromatherapy bath at Windsong. Afterward, he can retreat to a private room furnished with a window, a bed, home accessories and a television tuned to Animal Planet.

"We do a lot of hand holding," Michael said. "I'll stretch out with them and keep them comfortable."

Fido isn't keeping company with just any human. Michael is a judge for the Westminster Kennel Club dog show, so he knows something about pampered pets.

Only a handful of guests stay at the resort at a time so the Doughertys can provide five-star service to critters of all kinds.

"Our prices are the same as other kennels," Michelle said, "but we offer many extras."

Although the rooms don't have minibars, room service is available. A Kong chew toy with

peanut-flavored filling costs \$4, and a frozen chicken-flavored "pupcicle" is \$3.

Personal services such as aromatherapy baths start at \$15. A paw massage and nail trim costs \$8.

Other amenities such as a wading pool and Web cams are in development.

The three-acre property offers peace and serenity among rolling hills and meadows abundant with large oaks, pines and bougainvillea.

Michelle's whimsical metal sculptures infuse magic into the forest.

The Doughertys fled Los Angeles two years ago looking for a piece of heaven.

Michael was a high-powered public relations exec in the publishing industry with clients such as Maya Angelou, Larry King and Donald Trump. Michelle's work as a muralist had become physically demanding.

After arriving here, the couple decided they wanted to work together doing something they liked.

"I enjoyed the book 'Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow,'" Michael said.

"I can't see anyone getting into a business and not being passionate about it and not loving the nuts and bolts of the industry. If you don't love animals, people will see right through you."

Two years ago, the Doughertys bought property off Deer Springs

Windsong Pet Resort

WHAT A boutique boarding facility. Reservations required.

WHERE 1412 Windsong Lane, Escondido

PHONE (760) 233-5060

ONLINE windsongpets.com

Road that had been the site of a large-animal veterinary hospital. Windsong Pet Resort opened in January.

The division of labor came naturally.

"I know what dogs need and was able to make the resort functional," Michael said. "Michelle made it beautiful."

They share responsibility for bathing, grooming and exercising their guests. Both Michael and Michelle are runners, and they provide several walks a day for each dog.

"Michael gets up early and does the breakfast routine, and I do more in the evenings," Michelle said.

The comparisons to Tori Spelling and Dean McDermott, who filmed a reality show based on operating a B&B in Fallbrook, have not been lost on the Doughertys.

"We are the real version of 'Tori & Dean: Inn Love,' except we live here all the time," Michelle said.

The Doughertys are upbeat about the future of their business



The Doughertys entertain Cleo, who spent three weeks at the Windsong Pet Resort while her owners honeymooned in Hawaii.

despite the economy.

Bob Vetere, president of American Pet Products Association, agreed that they have little to worry about.

"There is a demographic that is less impacted by the recession," Vetere said. "These are young professionals and baby boomers with children in college who have more disposable income."

Vetere said this group has helped make pet grooming and pet sitting a \$3 billion industry.

"The boomers are turning to pets in such a big way that it really is a trend. They tend to humanize these pets and are turning to these humanlike products and services."

Lillian Cox is a freelance writer who lives in Encinitas.