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SPECIAL FEATURE

Pet Services

Only The Best

by Tina Dubuque

The expression 'It's a dog's (or cat's) life' couldn't be more accurate when you consider how much money Americans spend on their pets. Some pets live as cushy a life as their owners, even the celebrity ones. St. Louisans are every bit as willing to lavish attention—and money—on their pets, according to local groomers and boarders.

For many pet owners, their animals are like children, and they deserve to be groomed and cared for with the best products and services, says Frank Loveland of Aussie Pet Mobile, a new breed of spa that goes beyond typical grooming.

Inside its Mercedes vans, a hydrosurge bathtub circulates shampoo and water for a spa-like, penetrating bath massage. A ramp leads from the tub to a hydraulic-lift grooming table—both of which Loveland says are perfect for older dogs with less mobility. Dogs with special skin care needs can be treated to an aloe moisturizer that helps eliminate flaking, oatmeal conditioners perfect for managing cat hair tangles, and the deshed-



Baby Boy sleeps in style on an elaborate wooden bed with pony hair headboard from Lola & Penelope's.

ding 'Furminator'—developed in St. Louis—that promises to eliminate at least 60 percent of shedding if used every four to six weeks.

"Most of our clients are pressed for time and want to avoid having to drop off and pick up their pet at a groomer," he notes. And some dogs, Loveland adds, just can't handle the stress of waiting in a cage for hours to be groomed.

Lola & Penelope's Premier Pet Boutique & Wellness Center also caters to stress-free pet grooming. Owner Carol Will schedules one dog at a time and cages them only if they are a threat to other dogs. "We have a nice fenced-in area where dogs can hang out while they wait for their owners," she says. The 'Sparkle and Shine' spa treatment caters to the pampered pet who has an upcoming special event, while an aromatherapy massage can offer relief, says Will. A la

carte services such as 'pawdicures' and facials are also available.

The spike in pampering has been accompanied by a demand for some pretty remarkable pet supplies. Lola & Penelope's carries handmade leather pet collars imported from the south of France, adorned with a variety of customized crystal patterns. "We try to find the best and most unique clothing and accessory items—things you can't find anywhere else," Will says.

What's more, stylish pet furniture is all the rage, she says. "When people spend thousands of dollars decorating their home, they don't want an ugly pet bed that has to be hidden when company arrives," she notes. Custom-designed beds, dining stations, armoires and toy chests embrace every owner's decorating taste and lifestyle.

Coddled canines can also attend Doggie Day Camp at Kennelwood Village, which has taken pet care to a new level. Similar in concept to day care for children, it allows dogs of similar temperament and size to play with each other under supervision. "The dogs look forward to seeing their pals," says president Alan Jones. About 125 to 150 dogs a day are enrolled in five locations, says Jones.

Special 'howl-a-days' are held at least once a month with music, movies and party favors. "To celebrate Elvis' birthday in January, an Elvis impersonator was brought in to sing to the dogs, and each got a photo with 'the King,'" says Jones.

Pet hotels/resorts are another Kennelwood offering. These provide lodges and grand lodges for dog boarding—rooms outfitted with a toddler bed and satellite television tuned to Animal Planet. Some locations have theme-decorated suites. "We plan vacations so pets have an enriching experience while owners are away," Jones notes, which pretty much says it all.

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The Pampered Pet

With pet pampering such a popular trend, cats and dogs, especially, are treated more like a favorite relative than a four-legged friend. Below are a few of the more unique services offered.

◆The scoop on pet walking and, well, scooping...Adding a special spark in a pet's day by providing individualized attention is what dog walking is all about. **Critter Sitters** offers dog owners peace of mind, knowing their dog is getting midday exercise, says owner Tammy Tvetne. To pamper owners, the company takes the yuck factor out of critter cleanup.

◆Pets, like people, have colorful personalities...Some families say their family photo galleries or photo albums are not complete without pictures of their beloved pet. **Puppy Paws & Kittens** pet photographer Jeanne Newberry offers packages starting at \$130 for an in-home sitting and por-

trait. High-end packages include the pet's image on a blanket. "Coming to the home usually takes the stress out of the photo shoot—for both owner and the pet," Newberry says.

◆Pet aftercare...Once your precious pooch (or pussycat) has passed on, what do you do with the remains? For \$225, **Heartland Pet Cremation** will pick up your pet, cremate it individually and return the ashes within two or three days. Owner Oliver King says he opened Heartland in early 2006 and has cremated about 250 pets in the past year. "We didn't underestimate the need," he says. "Our customers include anyone who's taken their pet in the car while running errands and those who think about their pet when they're not with them." His service cremates just one pet at a time to ensure that owners receive only their pet's remains. LN