

When searching for a good day care, most parents look for a professional staff, a safe environment and a strong curriculum. Those who use a certain county day care get exactly that, even though the facility they use has gone to the dogs _ literally. Their "children" attend Dogwood Acres Pet Retreat, a quickly expanding kennel and canine day care service in Davidsonville. There, pampered pooches can spend the day romping with four-legged friends in one of five shaded play yards. They can even enjoy a bath or massage, then be dropped at home in a pet "limo." Owners Kurt and Audrey Reichardt of Edgewater opened Dogwood Acres in 1997 at what used to be Arundel Kennels. Their business grew out of frustration at the somewhat limited pet services offered in the area, "We owned a dog and felt there was not a place to serve our dog's needs," Mrs. Reichardt said. Obviously they weren't alone. The Reichardts said Dogwood Acres has been bustling with business since day one. Mr. Reichardt left a career in architecture to start the business, but says it was a logical move for an animal lover whose father, Karl Reichardt, is a veterinarian who owns Reichardt Animal Hospital in Edgewater. "I think it's in my blood. I really love it," he said. The dogs who frequent the place seem to love it, too. Davidsonville resident Karin Heffner drops off her 4-year-old yellow lab, Harley, two days a week for the day care. Her 12-year-old golden retriever, Sasha, is boarded there when Ms. Heffner is out of town. "My dogs love that place. They get a lot of attention. (Harley) sleeps for two days when he comes back from day care. He's a happy camper," she said. That's the main goal of the pet retreat, Mrs. Reichardt said. "The dogs are exhausted and tired and the owners don't have to worry about walking them. The dogs and the owners are both happy," she said. The day care consists of play toys, doghouses and playhouses, and acres of land for the canines to have fun. Nearly 30 dogs attend each day _ all grouped according to size, age and personality. The cost is \$18 a day, and there is no day care on Tuesdays. "The idea is for the dogs to have fun," Mr. Reichardt said, adding that Dogwood Acres also cares for other pets like cats, rabbits and even goldfish. With such a successful business, the couple hopes to expand the retreat by the fall. Currently, they use about a quarter of their 16 wooded acres. The Reichardts hope to add 50 new runs and six suites, complete with bed, rugs, a playground and a closed-circuit television for the more privileged pooches. Plans for an extended cat area call for more play room, a private indoor day care and an exercise room. "We always wanted to do something different," Mr. Reichardt said. "We're always trying to be the Nordstrom of this industry." Mrs. Reichardt said the facility cares for about 60 animals daily _ day care and boarded pets combined _ and the expansion should increase that number to around 100. Expanded or not, Dogwood Acres is a favorite.

For more information on Dogwood Acres Pet Retreat, call 410-798-4776 or visit the Web site at www.dogwoodacres.com.