

Love of dogs leads to successful business

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Morning Star Staff

"Yes they are your dogs, but they are mine when they are here."

That is Geri Saiko's motto and her love for animals is what has made 4 Paws Country Club such a successful business after only three years.

She started the dog kennel hotel, after 42 years in the dentistry field, to pursue her passion for looking after dogs.

Geri and her husband Jim, who operated a large greenhouse business on their acreage for years but was forced to retire after an injury to his arm, share their love for four-legged creatures.

When you pull into the 11-acre farm, in the Grandview Flats area of Spallumcheen, you are greeted by Jim's gigantic pet steer Buddy, six-foot two-inches tall, which he bought to raise and butcher but didn't have the heart to.

The Saikos have five dogs of their own, they spayed and neutered eight feral cats that had taken up residence in their barn and are caring for another stray cat in their kennel over winter.

Geri was brought up to have compassion for animals by her father who raised, trained and doctored horses with Geri by his side.

The greenhouses on the Saiko farm stood empty for 10 years until one day Geri came up with the idea to convert one of them into a state-of-the-art dog hotel.

"We had all the infrastructure for the greenhouses so we were able to incorporate heated flooring, commercial fans, great ven-



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Geri Saiko plays with two of her five dogs at 4 Paws Country Club in Spallumcheen.

tilation and lighting so it just made a lot of sense," she said.

The dog kennel hotel has large private rooms that open up with access to outdoor dog runs, where they can see and socialize with the other dogs but still stay safe in their own space.

The cage-free private rooms have excellent sound proofing to reduce noise and

stress.

"I raise dogs and when we went on vacation I was never really happy with where we would keep our dogs," said Geri. "So I said to my husband why don't we open a kennel where we would be happy to leave our dogs."

Geri has bred champion Swedish Vallhunds for the last 10 years and has high standards for the care of her dogs and the

dogs she boards.

4 Paws provides rooms with dog-cams so that their owners can check-in on their pet and Geri takes time to email personal updates on the animals in her care.

"This is a wonderful business and I enjoy it immensely," said Geri. "I get dogs of all ages — from puppies to the geriatrics, from physically fit athletes, to the arthritic — they all have room in my heart!"

Geri enjoys her daily route with the dogs, spending time with each of them, taking them for walks around the acreage, throwing balls or just sitting and giving a dog a back scratch.

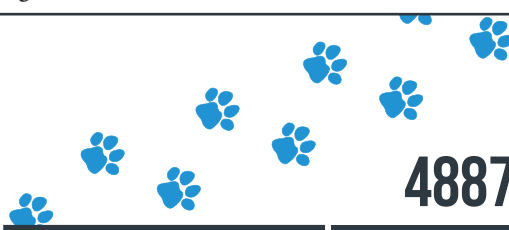
"The look in their eyes, smile on their faces, wet kisses and wagging tails just melt my heart," she said.

Geri does not believe in having dogs from different families sharing the same spaces.

"My aim is to have them leave here as safe as when they arrived," she said.

One of the couples returning customers makes the trip from Qualicum Beach to drop off their dog at 4 Paws Country Club before returning to the Lower Mainland to start their vacation.

"We acquired our canine companion from Geri and Jim and since that time have always used their services when we vacation," said Brian Gushulak. "Even though it is a 500 km drive for us to get there, the care, love and attention they provide ensures we return to a calm, relaxed and happy dog. It turns out to be a vacation for both the humans and the dog."



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