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Successful Kennel More Than Pet Project

The Progress Fund helps rural kennel maintain "day-care" philosophy under new owners

Ebensburg, PA – December 7, 2005 -- There's almost always been a Hite family member working at the Winterset Kennels.

The nine-year-old business, which James and Beverly Hite purchased in June with the assistance of The Progress Fund, has employed their sons almost from its start. Now that the Hites own the business, they have every intention of continuing the kennel's tradition as a sought-after country spot favored by pet owners from Johnstown to Altoona.

"They're comfortable that it's the same crew up there working with the dogs," says Beverly Hite. "It's worked so well from the previous owners, I wouldn't want to change anything. It's basically run like a daycare."

The kennel's loyal customers, taking advantage of the seven-acre facility during the summer vacation season, have been "so nice," Beverly says. "There are people already calling to book for 2006." And why not, since the kennel's rates are so reasonable: \$12 a day (\$14 if the dog requires medication).

Winterset has space for more than 40 pets. The largely canine clientele gets four walks every day, and each enjoys an individual outside run. The country setting offers many secluded dog-walking paths, Beverly notes, so that the kennel's neighbors aren't bothered by over-enthusiastic pooches.

The work, she adds, "is demanding -- seven days a week, with holidays. But we certainly wouldn't be doing it if we didn't love animals. We always tell our clients when they're bringing their animals in: Whatever will make them feel at home."

The Hites aren't kidding. They've hosted dogs who must have green beans with each meal, or carrots – or, in one case, a ham sandwich. Another dog enjoyed a chopped hard-boiled egg for a daily snack. "We laugh about it all the time" says Beverly. "It's like we have a little buffet going."

Sometimes a dog's special needs may even help with the workload a little. The Hites have already seen one canine who used a litter box exclusively.

“And they all have their special toys,” Beverly laughs.

After walks, the kennel's lights are turned down low, “and it gets quiet in there,” she says. “They get to know the routine.” That’s when kennel workers like to play the radio for the dogs.

The facility includes a large, two-story house, which the Hites have rented to an on-site manager so that Winterset residents can get constant supervision.

The Hites are experienced at running a business, having owned and operated a trucking business for the last 27 years.

Despite the Hites’ business acumen, it was tough getting financial assistance to purchase the place – at least on terms the couple could live with comfortably – banks were making the loan structuring very difficult.

The Progress Fund, she adds, “were wonderful to deal with. They liked what they saw and heard,” loaning the Hites \$207,000, using funds from the United States Department of Agriculture, toward the total purchase price of \$262,000.

“This is another industry that banks kind of shy away from,” says The Progress Fund’s Commercial Loan Officer, Jim Gonsman, but The Progress Fund had already financed a kennel in Centre County and the Hites “have the business savvy to keep it going.”

Customers in this large industry, he adds, “want to put their pets in a place where they can be sure the animals will be taken good care of.” At Winterset, the Hites’ experience assures peace of mind for those with furry loved ones.

For more information on Winterset Kennels, call (814) 472-7407. For further information on The Progress Fund, call (724) 529-0384, or visit www.progressfund.org.

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