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Staff photo by Sidney Thorns

Bow Wow Beach Club, a new doggie day care facility in Westchester, just opened to offer an alternative to kennels and homebound dogs. It also offers socialization, interaction, training programs and grooming. Owners Kathy Wakai and her husband, Jeff Ironside are holding their dog Bunker while standing next to a mural of their dog in the social area of the facility.

DOGGIE DAY CARE OPENS FOR PLAY

Bow Wow Beach Club pitches an alternative to kennels and homebound dogs **PAGE 6**

WESTCHESTER

Dog lovers open doggie day care

By Ellyn Ong Vea
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Just like kids in day care, dogs can get A's on their report cards for friendliness with peers and obedience to people in charge.

Dog lovers recently opened a day care for dogs, the Bow Wow Beach Club, on Mannheim Road in Westchester to offer socialization, interaction, boarding, training and grooming in an alternative to kennels and homebound dogs.

Jeff Ironside, 51, who opened the facility with his wife Kathy Wakai, 52, on Dec. 21, said clients are often couples working from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. who want to do more than hire someone to take out their dog once a day.

"The area has a lot of working couples whose dogs have become their kids," he said. "And dogs can have separation anxiety."

Ironside and Wakai come from business backgrounds and have owned dogs all their lives. Wakai raised a Labrador with specialized training in obedience and search and rescue and was part of Labrador clubs. Ironside worked at a dog day care in Prospect Heights, completed courses of the American Boarding and Kennel Association and will be certified in Pet First Aid and basic veterinary care.

The owners and two part-time workers were trained by the American Red Cross in Pet First Aid.

"Just in case something happens while they're here — they are dogs after all, and just like in kiddy day care, dogs can get hurt," he said. "But we're trained to look at stress signals, especially when they first come in."

The Oak Park couple's soft-coated Wheaten Terrier named Bunker is a fixture at Bow Wow and is in portraits illustrated as wearing sunglasses, surfing and laying out on sand.

Different areas of the facility are named after places special to the couple, such as the main play area — "Poipu Beach" on one side and "Princeville" on another, reflecting



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Staff photo by Sidney Thorns

Bow Wow Beach Club, a new doggie day care facility in Westchester recently opened to offer an alternative to kennels and homebound dogs. Charlie (left) trots past as Trixie Raymer, day care attendant is making a playful gesture to the dog while socializing at the facility.

Hawaii, where they were married in 2006.

People enter with their dogs through the back parking lot fenced off for the outdoor play and bathroom 20-by-40-foot area, and then the dogs stop in a 10-by-10-foot meet-and-greet area for a quick well-being check and to sniff dogs on the other side of the gated play area before entering it.

In the larger 4,000-square-foot play room, a worker supervises the dogs continuously and may play games such as hide-and-seek with the dogs. A maximum of 40 dogs can fit in this area, depending on size and temperament. So far, the facility has hosted about 24 different dogs — about two or three dogs a day.

Bella, who has a hard cast on one leg, is boarding for a few days. Rather than monitoring boarding dogs with a camera as is customary with most kennels, a worker will typically sleep on a cot near to dogs staying

At a glance

For more information, contact co-owner Jeff Ironside at (708) 681-DOGS or visit www.BowWowBeachClub.com.

overnight.

Other areas of the facility include a room for puppies and a kitchen area where dogs eat one at a time. Also, a grooming salon is run by Westchester resident Mikki Verber, 39.

Verber, who's been in the business for 20 years, said while she enjoys being creative with different haircuts on different furs, the most important thing about grooming is health, as matted hair can bruise skin or be a breeding ground for insects.

She said she has learned to speak to dogs better than her kids.

"Believe it or not, I've even sung to dogs."