

Seniors can fetch jobs from local company

By Janis Mara
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WHEN PAMELA Myers of Antioch was laid off in April 2007, the 54-year-old animal lover took a part-time job walking dogs for Berkeley-based Fetch! Pet Care, and ended up with not only a source of income but a regular full-time job.

"I happened to see the advertisement for Fetch, applied and was hired, and that was great. On my second job with Fetch, the client was looking for an office manager. I filled the bill with my office background, so I took on the job full-time and still continue to work part-time for Fetch," said Myers.

Currently, the 6-year-old company, which boasts a network of about 2,300 professional pet sitters and dog walkers in 33 states, is looking to hire retired people and seniors across the country, as well as other qualified applicants. The company has 10 franchises in the Bay Area, including branches in the East Bay, San Francisco and San Mateo.

"The job offers seniors daily exercise as well as companionship," said Paul Mann, who founded the service in 2002, working from his Berkeley home. Fetch puts its workers through background checks and a one-day training course before unleashing them on its clients to provide services such as dogwalking, boarding dogs in their own homes, overnight sitting or pet transportation.

Mann is tapping a rich customer base. Americans spent some \$3 billion on pet services such as boarding and grooming in 2007, according to the

American Pet Products Manufacturers' Association, and this will likely jump 7 percent in 2008. Such services will continue to grow in 2008, said Laura Bennett, chief executive of Embrace Pet Insurance.

From hamsters to Clydesdales, Fetch cares for just about every kind of pet imaginable. "We have some clients in Tracy with livestock," Mann said. Fees range from \$20 to \$22 for a 20- to 30-minute visit and dog walk to \$55 to \$65 per night for a Fetch employee to pet-sit overnight in the client's home.

"I started the service because I couldn't find reliable, professional pet care," said Mann. "Most of the people were booked up when I called or didn't cover my area or I didn't feel comfortable giving them the keys to my home."

A former operations executive, Mann has put his experience with IBM, Estee Lauder and two startups to work organizing Fetch.

"The petsitters out there are great people, but what's missing is for it to be professional and reliable. We systematized the back-office operations. Our software allows us to book a client order and track it, and sends automated reminders to employees via e-mail. We conduct an online survey after each assignment to measure how each pet sitter did," Mann said. His service now has franchises in almost every major U.S. city.

Mann wouldn't give the privately held company's annual revenue, but it's up 224 percent according to Mann, who often leaves his two tabby cats, Finnegan and Marley, in the care of his employees when on trips.

"I've used Fetch for my dog Rocky since he was a puppy," said Pam Durkin of San Ramon. "He

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was born with only one eye — that's why we named him Rocky, because he's a fighter."

Address: Company is Web-based

The dog is a Havanese, a tiny silky-haired breed.

"Generally we have the same pet sitter. She lives nearby and has two little dogs. He stays at her house and plays with her dogs," Durkin said.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from 8-pound Rocky is Crikey, a 72-pound pit bull, blonde with green eyes, belonging to Stacy Morris of Tracy.

"He's so calm after he's with Alison," Morris said. "He was more relaxed with her than with my last pet sitter. I think they're a great company and I'm lucky to have found them when I did."

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Fetch! pet care

Founded: 2002

Founder: Paul Mann

Number of Employees: 2,300 part-time pet walkers and sitters

Annual Revenue: Privately owned company; declined to say

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