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August 10, 2005

COMINGS & GOINGS

**4 paws up for dog care**

Former IT worker follows her bliss, creates a day play haven for pooches.

By William J. Booher

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Playing and lounging is a dog's life at Brigitte Baker's new place.

Baker wants it that way, as evidenced by the name of her new business -- Barkalounge Doggy Daycare.



Delighting in dogs: Brigitte Baker (front) entertains guests, including Emma, at her new business,

There are no cages in the 4,800-square-foot Barkalounge at 5555 Elmwood Ave., northeast of I-465 and Emerson Avenue.

Instead, dogs get to socialize in four gated indoor play areas complete with doggy toys.

The two largest play areas are 850 square feet each, and a balcony overlooking them gives dog owners a clear view of the canines at play.

Open since June, Barkalounge's innovative approach to dog boarding focuses on letting dogs socialize and exercise while their owners

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Barkalounge Doggy Daycare. Valerie Vance (background) also was working Thursday morning in the 4,800-square-foot dog house. - Walt Winter / For The Star

### **Barkalounge**

- **What:** Day care for dogs.
- **Where:** 5555 Elmwood Ave., northeast of I-465 and Emerson Avenue in Franklin Township.
- **Other services:** Overnight boarding, primarily for daycare customers, plus dog products and obedience classes.
- **Day care hours:** 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.
- **More information:** Call (317) 788-8551 or visit the Web site at [www.barkaloungedaycare.com](http://www.barkaloungedaycare.com).

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validated veterinarian and health records and be spayed or neutered.

Day care is provided from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.

Barkalounge offers online doggy cams accessible through its Web site -- [www.barkaloungedaycare.com](http://www.barkaloungedaycare.com) -- so a dog owner at work can see how the dog is faring during the day.

"The Doggy Cam is the neatest thing," DeOrto said of being able to watch Gracie and Parker while she's at work. "It's addictive. My whole office stops and looks at them."

Baker said overnight boarding is available, primarily for day-care customers for an extra \$11, but Barkalounge's focus is on day care.

Baker's love of animals -- she has adopted two stray dogs and three stray cats -- attracted her to creating her own business.

Baker, 39, who lives in Fountain Square on the Near-Southside, has a master's degree

are at work, said Baker.

Kim DeOrto's two Weimaraners, Gracie and Parker, visit two days a week as DeOrto works as a dental hygienist at Indiana Periodontics in Greenwood.

DeOrto, 33, who is single and a Franklin Township resident, said she doesn't have time to go home for lunch on work days to let her two purebred German bird dogs outdoors for relief and exercise.

So, on those two nine-hour workdays, Gracie and Parker go to day care at Barkalounge, she said.

She said that after a day at Barkalounge, her pets "are completely exhausted. They're happy and tired, and I'm happy and tired."

On a recent morning, Gracie and Parker played with day boarders Romeo and Pattan, along with Baker's own two canines, Lainey and Emma, and Barkalounge worker Valerie Vance's dog, Scrubs.

To be accepted at the \$25-a-day Barkalounge (less for multiday packages), each dog must go through temperament evaluations, have

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in management and business administration.

She specialized in information technology, with her last employment as executive director for systems and programming for Health Care Excel in Indianapolis, a government contractor for Medicaid and Medicare quality improvement.

"I enjoyed the people I worked with but not what I was doing," she said. "My heart wasn't in it."

She left in April to begin creating Barkalounge in leased space in a one-story building along Elmwood. "It's all for the dogs," she said.

Her husband, Brian Baker, 39, a ceramics engineer at Knauf Fiberglass in Shelbyville, gives support to her dream, she said.

Sisters Valerie Vance, 22, and Emily Vance, 18, both Speedway, are employed by Baker to help with the care, including cleaning the concrete and specially treated hardwood flooring.

"I think it's a great setup, a great place for dogs. They're always supervised," said Valerie Vance, who has years of experience working at dog kennels.

Barkalounge also sells dog collars, dog food and treats and offers dog obedience classes.

"Being my own boss, forming a company of my own and centering it on dogs is a dream come true," Baker said.

**Call Star reporter William Booher at (317) 444-2706.**

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Delighting in dogs: Brigitte Baker (front) entertains guests, including Emma, at her new business, Barkalounge Doggy Daycare. Valerie Vance (background) also was working Thursday morning in the 4,800-square-foot dog house.

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