



Lori Audette, owner of Max and Me Pet Sitting Service, with Sebastian, one of her clients. The Cumberland woman started the pet sitting business after an injury caused her to leave her office job.

Valley Breeze photo by George Beaubien

Pet sitting venture, 'Max and Me,' finds demand for services

By **GEORGE BEAUBIEN**
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CUMBERLAND - People who love their cat or dog will tell you they consider them to be a member of their family just as they would a child.

And so it comes as no surprise that such people worry about what to do with their pets if they are planning a vacation or are required to travel out of town on business.

Placing an animal in a kennel is possible, but to many, not an option they would consider.

"Some people want a more personal relationship with their pets," says Lori Audette, who recently opened her Max and Me Pet Sitting Service. "I could never find it in my heart to have my own pet boarded in a cage while I'm away."

Audette's professional pet sitting service arrived serendipitously. For many years she was content working as an administrative assistant to an attorney.

After recovering from back surgery, she found it painful to continue to work in an office environment where most of her

40 hour work week was spent sitting in a chair.

"I knew I had to do something," said Audette, "I just didn't know what."

But what she did know was that for the 14 years that Max, her yellow lab was a part of her life, she enjoyed every moment with him, especially the countless walks they took together.

"We were always together," said Audette. "We were inseparable."

After Max died, she wasn't quite ready to bring a new puppy into her family, but neither could she be without a four-legged furry creature.

She began offering to take pets belonging to her family or friends for walks, just for the joy of it.

"One day I was out walking a friend's dog and I began to think 'I really like this. This would be perfect for me.'"

After arriving home, she shared her thoughts with her husband. "He asked me if it was

something I thought I really wanted to do. I told him it would be right for me. I could work my own hours and I think it's something people would be willing to pay for."

And so what began as a professional pet sitter for a few friends has blossomed into a viable business for Audette that now keeps her as busy as she wants to be.

In addition to walking, feeding and watering a family cat or dog, Audette's pet sitting visits come bundled with lots of attention, including petting and playtime.

"I don't know who enjoys it more, the pets or me," said Audette.

Pet sitting rates for dogs are \$18 for one visit per day. Two visits on the same day cost \$33 and the cost for a three-visit day is \$45.

And yes, for animals or their owners prone to separation

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anxiety, overnight pet sitting is available for \$45 for up to two dogs in the same household.

The rate for felines is \$15 for one visit and \$10 for the second visit in the same day.

Audette will also provide round-trip pet taxi service to a groomer or a veterinarian at a cost of \$20.

Insured and bonded, Audette is a member of Pet Sitters

International as well as Pet Sittings Association. Her services are available to animal residents of northern Rhode Island and nearby Massachusetts.

Although she may appear to be the sole proprietor of Max and Me Pet Sitting Service, there's an important entity that remains unseen.

Her new business is named in honor of her never-to-be forgotten yellow lab of many years.

"People always ask me who Max is, and I tell them he is my silent partner," said Audette.