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CONTACT:

Mindy Doddridge

Cleveland Metrobark

216-881-DOGG (3644)

mindy@metrobark.com

CLEVELAND METROBARK—WHERE DAYCARE GOES TO THE DOGS

CLEVELAND—Imagine a daycare with lots of things to chew and tennis balls to chase. Imagine a daycare where your loved ones can spend all day outside laying in the sun or romping through the water. Imagine a daycare that includes baths and snacks. Is there such a place? Yes! Cleveland Metrobark, the daycare for dogs.

Founded by dog lovers Mindy Doddridge and Bill Patterson, Cleveland Metrobark caters to pet owners who want to leave their dogs in a fun, nurturing, active environment instead of home alone. “Dogs are very social creatures,” says co-owner Doddridge. “Cleveland Metrobark provides them with a place where they can socialize with other dogs and an open environment where they can play.”

For a nominal daily fee, dog owners can drop their pets off for full or partial day sessions. Facilities include an open indoor play room with plenty of toys and a large fenced in yard, complete with wading pools and sprinklers for wet, hot weather fun. Metrobark serves mid-day snacks and provides blankets for naps. And this may be the only place where dogs are allowed on the couch.

If your dog needs grooming, Metrobark has staff members who are trained in the grooming and bathing of your favorite canine. And dogs that need special medical attention are also welcome, as long as owners leave instructions.

The Metrobark staff asks certain requirements be met prior to admission.

Dogs must:

- Be 12 weeks old and in good health
- Be six months or older and be spayed/neutered
- Have all vaccinations up to date
- Be non-aggressive and not food or toy protective

“We need to have the rules to protect all our clients and our staff,” says Doddridge.

Pricing begins at \$19 per day for three visits, then drops to \$17 for the fourth and fifth visit. Half-day visits are \$12. Metrobark offers discounts to police and fire fighters, and for frequent visitors, they offer the Frequent Barker Card.

Cleveland Metrobark is conveniently located in the Midtown Office District at 3939 Payne Avenue in Cleveland. For more information about this doggie daycare, call 216-881-DOGG (3644), 216-702-BARK (2275), or visit their website, www.metrobark.com.

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ENTREPRENEURISM

DOGGONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Mindy Doddridge ensures that every dog has its day care.

Those doggone days when Scruffy has to fend for himself for eight hours are becoming a thing of the past.

Though "Take your dog to work day" has failed to become a workplace tradition, Mindy Doddridge is easing the guilt for dog owners who work full time.

The 25-year-old owner of The MetroBark in downtown Cleveland was first introduced to a doggie day-care center, called Puppy Camp, about three years ago while living in downtown Cincinnati with her sister, Jen. Doddridge loved the idea of opening her own day care for dogs, but at the time she was at Miami University pursuing a degree in elementary education. After teaching for a year and a half, Doddridge became disenchanted and quit in December 2001.

The Mentor native interviewed with law firms and insurance companies but nothing sparked her interest. Then her boyfriend, Bill Patterson, persuaded Doddridge to open The MetroBark. Patterson, along with Doddridge's father, Tom, helped to finance the initial cost of \$38,000.

In February 2002, Doddridge contacted Puppy Camp for advice and training in opening a dog day-care center. Rather than answering Doddridge's questions, the people at Puppy Camp mentored her through the process.

"Mindy came down and stayed with us for four days," says Susan Woodcock, a partner at Puppy Camp. "We made a list of every single item she would need [and also] showed her the kind of setup that makes dogs the happiest."

A late zoning permit prevented advanced advertising, so at the eleventh hour, Doddridge worked diligently posting flyers at local veterinarians' offices, sending out press releases to area newspapers and radio and television stations. The MetroBark also sponsored the recent APL Dog Walk, which increased exposure.

The demand for a business like hers is quite high, Doddridge says, and, as a result, has contributed to the business' success so far.



MINDY DODDRIDGE AND A CANINE FRIEND.

"Everybody always said if you're going to open up a business you're not going to make money for a year, you're not going to break even," Doddridge says. "We broke even in approximately eight weeks. We hoped it would go this well but didn't plan on it until the third or fourth month."

Breaking even, says Doddridge, is due largely to The MetroBark's Payne Avenue location, as well as its convenient hours and reasonable prices. Clients drop off their dogs Monday through Friday as early as 6:30 a.m. and pick them up as late as 7 p.m. If clients are running late, they just need to call.

A single day of care is available for

\$19, while a package of 10 days is available for \$170 and 20 days at \$300 for those clients who pay in advance.

In addition to a full day of care, MetroBark employs a part-time groomer, schedules Saturday play days once a month, and organizes and caters canine birthday parties. The MetroBark also offers dog training through North Coast Dogs, a dog-training group in Cleveland. Doddridge's business also offers overnight boarding. The facility itself is 7,600 square feet, with an outdoor area of 14,000 square feet. Future plans for a full grooming facility and a puppy day care are in the works.

— KRISTEN FRY