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Potomac ALMANAC



Carmella enters pool with the help of swim coach Erica Dale at the K9 Aquatic and Wellness Center.

30-Minute Workout

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Running for At-Large Council Seats

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PHOTO BY BILL BRONROTT

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ONLINE AT POTOMACALMANAC.COM

COMMUNITY

It's A Dog's Life

Lap dogs of a different kind paddle for fun and fitness at Potomac Aquatic Center.

BY BILL BRONROTT
SPECIAL TO THE ALMANAC

One in three Maryland households have a dog, and most are considered a member of the family. Little wonder the buzz about a modest storefront on Travilah Road that is home to pools built exclusively to exercise and entertain our canine kids in Montgomery County and beyond.

Upon walking through the doors with my seven-year-old Spinone Italiano, Carmella, we were greeted by Dominique Darcis. An admitted “Lab addict,” the Parisienne transplant was inspired by her Labrador retrievers to “build the pools they were dreaming of.” And, thus was born the K9 Aquatic and Wellness Center, which celebrates its two-year anniversary this month.

Darcis led Carmella and I into the aquatic center, revealing five glistening swimming pools reminiscent of the healing baths of ancient Rome that are now a modern-day oasis for our four-legged family members.

The four-foot deep pools are heated and equipped with ramps for easy egress. An abundance of floating toys is nearby to entice pups to paddle forward.

Each dog is assigned a swim coach who



Carmella sits on the ramp on her inaugural swim, seen here with swim coach Erica Dale.

works with them one-on-one in the water on a tailored program to meet their specific health or recreational needs across the age and abilities spectrum.

LOW IMPACT, HIGH RESULTS

Over the years of caring for her many Labs, Darcis found that swimming was the best answer to treating their arthritis or rehabbing them after surgery, and for the fun of retrieving sticks. She first took her Labs across the river to a swim facility in

Middleburg for both horses and dogs. “It was not heated and the lanes lacked ramps,” she said. “Ramps are important because dogs often cannot see stairs.”

Darcis set aside her antiques business to launch the aquatic center for dogs across the age and abilities spectrum. “Dogs don’t stop playing because they grow old; they grow old because they stop playing,” she said. “One minute of swimming is like four minutes of running. It’s the ideal low impact, high results exercise for them.”

EXERCISE FOR K9 HEALTH

Darcis professes the many benefits of swimming for health management and a wide range of medical purposes, including:

- ❖ Mobility issues like arthritis, hip dysplasia, and joint stiffness
- ❖ Weight reduction and management
- ❖ Improved body condition and physical performance
- ❖ Cardiovascular and respiratory fitness
- ❖ Stress relief, including working dogs (assistance dogs and police K9)
- ❖ Pain management
- ❖ Post-surgery conditioning

“There is nothing more rewarding than seeing dogs having fun and our senior swim-



Carmella paddles ahead, with guidance from swim coach Erica Dale.

mers becoming young pups again.”

MEET CARMELLA

Swim coach Erica Dale suited up Carmella with her required floatation vest. Carmella’s specific challenge is trimming some weight off of her 94-pound physique while strengthening her heart, leg muscles and joints.

Erica led her onto the ramp where Carmella temporarily staged a sit-down strike. Taking it in stride, Erica gently led her into the pool and she immediately put her webbed paws to the test pushing against the water. All the while her good-natured swim coach carefully guided her to the end and the pool, helping her turn around to finish her first of numerous laps that session.

Afterwards, Carmella rested contently and slept most of the ride home. She has since been back for another 30-minute workout, which seemed easier than her inaugural session. A great way to supplement her frequent walks in the neighborhood. She will be back!



Meet Maddie

Maddie, age 7, has been coming to the aquatic center since the doors opened in May of 2016, explained her owner, Marilyn Poole of Poolesville.

“She got arthritis early in life in her hind knees” Poole said. “She’s been going to the aquatic center every Sunday since it opened, and it’s really helped her a lot.”

Darcis added that Maddie “didn’t like to swim first, but the low impact exercising makes her feel really good, and she now can swim circles around some of the others.”



CONNECTING WITH K9 AQUATIC AND WELLNESS CENTER

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240-683-1100
Website: <http://k9aquaticcenter.com>
Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/k9aquaticcenter/>
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HOURS
All hours are by appointment. No drop-ins.
Tuesday to Saturday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Sunday: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Closed on Monday.
Customized hours available.
Call for details.
PRICES
SWIM SESSIONS \$44
30-minute swim session for fun or for hydrotherapy (swim coach included in every session)



Lily, a 12-year-old, 100-pound yellow lab is a regular client. Lily has suffered from hip dysplasia and arthritis. Her hydrotherapy regimen over the past several months has produced positive results.

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