

Business

New pet biz caters to growing market

By Rowena Vergara

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR

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LOVES PARK — Call her a sitter, a nanny, a keeper. Sherri Ruston will take care of your loved ones while you're gone by keeping them healthy, safe and occupied under her watch.

She'll address any questions you have of her day care facility, what time all the little ones eat and take naps and what activities are planned throughout the day. She's been known to even sing with them, too.

There's one requirement though: make sure the tykes have all their vaccines and shots for parasites, rabies, ticks and so forth.

Ruston's place is not your average day care. She runs Happy Camper Pet Resort, one of the first entirely cage-free dog facilities in the Rock River Valley.

While it sounds a little extreme to model dog sitting after baby sitting or child daycare, Rock River Valley pet owners are expressing the same compassion, care — and money — as they would on children or other family members. Fury and four legged are now the newest characteristics to make up the modern day family.

A look at pet ownership in the Rock River Valley shows that homeowners spent almost the same amount on pet services, foods, toys and accessories as they did on children's toys.

Homeowners in Winnebago and Boone counties spent more on their pets than they did on beauty salon services and jewelry purchases. They also spent the same amount of toys and games and just a little less on footwear.

Membership to Canine Corners, a dog park run through the Rockford Park District, has tripled since opening in January 2004 from 200 members to 800.

Ruston will open Happy Camper Pet Resort next week.