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Daily Press guide: Peninsula pet sitters

By [Nicole Paitsel](#)

247-4737

December 13, 2009

When Jonathan Register and his wife, Jen, adopted Mackenzie, they didn't realize how often they would have to call on friends and family members for help.

The Labrador and pit bull mutt is full of energy, and since the Registers live in a townhouse, Mackenzie requires several walks a day.

"We both worked full time, and it just got to the point where we felt like we were imposing on our family," Jonathan says. "I looked for a professional dog walker in the phone book, and I couldn't even really find someone who would call me back."

In his dilemma, Jonathan also saw a business opportunity. At the time, the 25-year-old was working for a commercial real estate company, but he spent his spare time dreaming up ways he could own his own business.

In October 2008, the couple officially opened Arf! Pet Care, a pet sitting and dog walking service that serves residents in Newport News, York County and Poquoson. Just this summer, Jonathan was able to quit his other job to work full time on Arf!, which now has a staff of 15 pet sitters.

Like most pet sitting companies, Arf! offers more than just dog walking. Pet owners can choose a 30-minute pet visit, a dog walk, in-home boarding (the pet spends the night at the pet sitter's home), in-home overnight sitting (the pet sitter spends the night at your home), pet taxi services, yard cleanup and vacation home care. Rates generally range from \$15 to \$50 for various services.

And the sitting service isn't just for dogs. Pet sitters can help care for most pets, including cats, reptiles, fish and horses.

Arlene Ladusky of Newport News saw a similar need for pet care on the Peninsula, and she quit her job as an office assistant after 20 years to start her business, Auntie A's Pet Sitting. In January, she accepted her first clients as a one-woman operation.

"People say to me that I have a cushy job, but there's really a lot to do," she says.

Some of that includes offering pet visits, overnight visits and pet taxi services to clients in Newport News and Yorktown. She also serves as volunteer with the German shepherd rescue organization, so she feels she has a

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special talent for interacting with dogs that have personality quirks.

"Pet sitting is so much more than showing up and doing the basics," she says. "You really have to be prepared and to expect the unexpected."

But letting a stranger into your home to care for your possessions and your pet can be an uncomfortable move. Register and Ladusky give these tips for finding the right pet sitter:

- Make sure you meet with the pet sitter before you strike any deals.
- Make sure the company is licensed, insured and bonded. You can double check the business license with the city the company is based in.
- Ask if the pet sitters undergo a criminal background check. Ask to see the third-party documentation.
- Ask the sitter about his or her past experience with animals. Are they pet owners themselves? What types of animals do they have experience with?
- Ask for references. Be wary if the references do not respond in a timely manner.
- Ask about the communication expectations between pet owner and sitter. How will the sitter communicate with you? How quickly can you expect a response to questions? Those are also good questions to ask of the references.
- Does your sitter have a backup plan in case he or she can't make it? Does he have a strategy on how to deal with a pet emergency that may require a vet's attention?

Local pet sitters

Here are the Peninsula-based pet sitting options.

Arf! Pet Care. Serves Newport News, York County and Poquoson. Fees range from \$15-\$50. 301-4747. arfpetcare.com.

Auntie A's Pet Sitting. Serves Newport News and Yorktown. Fees range from \$16-\$40. 814-1098. auntiea.net.

Critter Sitter. Serves Suffolk, Windsor, Franklin, Smithfield, Chuckatuck and Carrollton. Fees start at \$15, with additional fees for special requests. 925-9082. crittersit.vpweb.com.

Homefront Pet Care. Serves Newport News, York County, Poquoson, Gloucester and Williamsburg. Fees range from \$15-\$18 per visit. 897-4899. homefrontpetcare.com.

Home Safe 'N Happy. Serves Hampton, Newport News and Yorktown. Fees range from \$20-\$30. 871-9447. homesafenhappy.com.

Pawsatively Wonderful. Serves Gloucester, Mathews, Lancaster counties, Middlesex County, Williamsburg and Yorktown. Fees range from \$17 to \$45. 804-824-9160. propetsitting.com.

Stay! Pet Sitting. Serves Hampton and Newport News. Fees range from \$13.50 to \$45. 814-9715.

staypetsitting.com.

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