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Woof and turf

Synthetic grass is fine for pooches, too

By Christine Steele

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Mia and Hanna come home tired at the end of the day. After hours of romping outdoors with their friends they arrive home exhausted, tongues hanging out, too tired to cause any trouble.

Which is fine with their owners, Christie Swimley, 30, and Karen Schneiders, 35, both of Loveland.

A couple of times a week, the Loveland women take Mia, a high-strung Australian kelpie mix with separation anxiety, and Hanna, a bundle-of-energy Australian shepherd with a penchant for pillows and shoes, to Boyd Lake Veterinary Center's doggy day care.

There, the mischievous pups meet up with others like Wylie, a 2 1/2-year-old border collie with an appetite for books and videos and even drywall, where they all romp to their hearts' content.

The women all spend about \$100 to \$150 a month or so to send their dogs to doggy day care a couple of times a week.

"It gives you peace of mind to know your dog is happy and your house is safe," said Judy Rayboy of Greeley, owner of the drywall-chewing Wylie.

Swimley agreed.

"It's gets out all their anxious energy and they are basically too tired to rip up the house at that point," Swimley said.

Pat Doherty, owner of Boyd Lake Veterinary Center, started doggy day care about a year and a half ago. Aside from boarding, Doherty said he averages about 25 to 30 dogs a day at the day care where they romp and roll around with others in the outdoor play area.

After trying grass, which he installed at the height of the drought and which required more watering than the conservation-minded Doherty could stand, then pea gravel, which hurt some dogs' feet and created a muddy mess, Doherty has decided to try something new.

Synthetic grass.

Don't call it Astroturf, said Bob Wolta, sales manager for ProGreen, the Denver-based company that is installing the turf.



Blaze Trotter, a golden retriever and day care dog at Boyd Lake Veterinary Center in Loveland, plays on new synthetic grass with his other day care pals Friday. Kennel helpers Shamar Ellis, left, and Steve Sherry keep an eye on the pooches as they exercise. ProGreen employees work to finish installing about 6,000 square feet of the synthetic grass in the background.

Reporter-Herald/Jenny Sparks

The 19-year-old, family-owned company builds and designs 35 different turf products, installing them all over the country.

The company started out doing athletic fields, backyards, home putting greens and children's playgrounds, but has found the dog business picking up over the last several years.

"It evolved from a customer saying, 'Hey, this is great for our backyard for our dog,' to us saying, 'Hey, maybe this would be good for kennels and veterinary clinics,'" owner Steve Walker said.

The product creates a softer, cleaner, play area that can be easily disinfected, he said.

"Dogs tend to get more exercise and play and run around more because it is easier on their feet."

Doherty will spend about \$25,000 installing the new turf, which he said will take about 21/2 years to pay for itself.

Doherty's customers are excited about the new turf as well.

"Hanna's notorious for tipping over the water dish and playing in the mud," Schneiders said. "This way she won't come home crusty."

The turf is guaranteed for eight years but can last up to 20, Walker said.

Tom Bonfili, owner of Cottonwood Kennels in Boulder installed the turf in one of the smaller play areas at his kennel in October and is thrilled with the results.

"It turned out better than I ever hoped for," he said.

He plans on installing it in a larger play area in April.

"Dogs love it," Walker said. "They really do think it's grass."