

There are three branches to exotics specialty medicine, and Collins is trained in each—birds, reptiles and small mammals—as well as zoological and injured wildlife. She welcomes any of these as long as they fit through the front door of the veterinary hospital.

Dogwood is a “fear-free” animal hospital, according to Collins, who says, “Decisions are made with emphasis on reducing an animal’s stress during appointments.”

Newly renovated, the clinic features an exotics-only exam room. One side of the hospital is for dogs only; the other side is reserved for cats and exotics. The separation leads to noise reduction, which helps ease the stress on the furry—or scaly—patients.

Education is extremely important to the well-being of animals, according to Collins.

“The No. 1 problem we see in exotic pets is improper husbandry,” she says. “Often they don’t have the right diet, they don’t have the right light sources, or the heat in the cage is wrong. A solid 80 percent of our appointments are teaching people about what is appropriate for their animal.”

► Dogwood Veterinary Hospital hosts quarterly Veterinary AMA (Ask Me Anything) Talks. Collins will host her first AMA Talk on exotics on Dec. 5.

ser • en • i • ty: *the state of being calm, peaceful and untroubled*

A Serene Place for Pampering Pets

Beth Ramsey is the hands-on proprietor of Serenity Dog Retreat in Newnan. This exclusive home-away-from-home for pampered pets sits on a secluded property, where the dogs have the run of an exquisite historic Georgian plantation home.

“This is a 70-acre farm and they were selling 25 acres, so when I walked through the house, I’m like, ‘this is it,’” says Ramsey. “It had the pool; I wanted a pool. The garage; I knew I could convert that. I wanted it to be very homey and beautiful.”

Her clientele are dog owners who want nothing but the best for their beloved pets. Some of her canine guests are long-term boarders while others come for day stays, but no matter what the length of time spent at Serenity, all of the dogs become comfortable with the staff and location, according to Ramsey, who says her retreat caters to each dog’s specific needs.

Ramsey conducts a four-hour evaluation for all potential guests to assure that they will be a good fit for the facility. The open environment allows dogs to be around each other while enjoying structured play and exercising, then relaxing afterwards, which makes for a zen-like experience for the four-legged crowd.

“I want to be the antithesis of what a kennel is,” Ramsey says. Unlike kennels, Serenity Dog Retreat features all-inclusive pricing, which means that every dog guest gets the same add-on services at no additional charge, plus the same top-notch care. For added indulgence, dog spa services are available, including massage, hot oil fur treatments and “pawdicures.”



Photo by Sara Moore

Beth Ramsey makes her home one for the dogs at Serenity Dog Retreat.



Copper, the golden retriever, rests after a dip in the pool while Max, a terrier mix, contemplates playing with a ball.



“When play groups get implemented, it changes everything. The dogs are getting out, in groups, interacting with each other, making their own choices. Some play, some relax, some are versatile and go with the flow of the group. Every dog gets a chance.”

— Rafael Fontan, Owner of RafStar K9 LLC, Trainer with Dogs Playing For Life



Photos by Sara Moore



LEFT

Beth Ramsey, left, and her assistant, Annie Feldman, hang out at the pool with the clientele at Serenity Dog Retreat.

TOP

Ramsey gets outdoors with the dogs to keep them active during their stay at Serenity.

ABOVE

Ramsey takes a client, Mickey the miniature labradoodle, to visit a horse at the fence.

Ramsey chooses to maintain a low volume of dogs at Serenity. All of her dog suites come equipped with toddler beds, rugs, frozen toys filled with peanut butter, and TVs playing animal favorites on DVD. The private rooms are cozy and homey, but the dogs only stay in the suites for sleeping and feeding. Otherwise, they are out and about, playing and socializing with other dogs.

Dogs have access to nearly the entire house. There are quiet places for less social dogs, while the more active set can run in the yard and play. Ramsey leads her boarders in art projects, making paw prints and laminating them for their owners to cherish. The bacon bubble machine adds some unexpected fun in the sun, and there are mental puzzle games provided for stimulation. There's a pool for dogs to take a dip on the hottest days.

Serenity also welcomes dogs with special needs, and senior dogs also find comfort here, according to Ramsey.

"The name is 'Serenity' for a reason," she concludes. "It is a peaceful environment." NCM