The Need for Pet Fitness Facilities

A Business Plan for a New Pet Fitness Center and How These Centers Will Help Keep You and Your Pet Fit

Tag Words: Pet Fitness; Fitness Center; Business Plan; Pet Fitness Center

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Summary:
Most kennels are strictly for boarding and offer no opportunity for pet owners to interact with their pets during their stay. Fitness is not a focus or generally an offered service of most kennels. With pet obesity on the rise, pet fitness facilities have recently begun to start up, but these usually just focus on the pet’s fitness and seldom offer any type of boarding. Our solution would be to start up a kennel and fitness business where pets and their owners can be active together and pets can stay housed in a safe, relaxing environment while their owners are away.

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7FeEb5ER30

The Need for Pet Fitness Centers

What is a Pet Fitness Center? (SH)

Pet fitness centers are facilities that provide exercise and training for companion animals. These facilities allow owners to bring their pets in for the day and exercise while they’re at work. Some facilities even allow for overnight stays, and thus double as a kennel. These businesses differ from traditional dog walking services because they provide personal trainers to work with and monitor your dog, so instead of simply taking your pet for a stroll, an endurance athlete would take him for a run or even a swim. These facilities are mainly geared towards the wellness of dogs, but some facilities have programs for cats.

These facilities house special equipment for exercising purposes, such as a swimming pools and water treadmills. Swimming is a good alternative to running because it provides an aerobic workout that can increase heart rate, blood flow, lung capacity, cut body weight, tone and build muscles. Exercising in water offers a particular benefit for animals (and people) that have muscular or skeletal problem such as hip dysplasia, arthritis, and muscle atrophy or may be recovering from surgery. Separate sentence when you get a reference…that will also benefit from swimming because it promotes healing and can shorten the recovery time. REFERENCE

Do We Need Pet Fitness Facilities? (SH)

Due to busy work schedules and a more sedentary lifestyle, people have less free time to devote to their own fitness, and to the fitness of their pets. Over 54 percent of cats and dogs in the country are overweight or obese (REF). This disorder causes a decrease in life-expectancy, an
increase in the risk of cranial cruciate ligament injury, heart and respiratory disease, insulin resistance and Type-2 diabetes and osteoarthritis (REF).

Bad behavior in animals can also be attributed to a lack of exercise. When dogs don't get enough exercise, they become frustrated and even destructive or hyper, this can manifest into behaviors such as chewing furniture, scratching doors, running or jumping recklessly in the house and other problems (REF). Behavior problems may go away when dogs exercise. Thus, it is important to find some way to provide your pet with the physical activity it needs.

Other benefits of exercise include: improved body condition & physical performance, cardiovascular fitness, faster recovery from surgery, faster recovery from sprain or strain, reduced pain, decreased muscle atrophy from disuse, weight reduction & management, obesity prevention, and positive effects on the mind. Need references and more descriptions maybe about the studies

**Where to Find Dog Fitness Centers** (SH)

Not many dog fitness centers have been established in North America. Examples of ones we identified were:

- **DogOn Fitness in DC** - This center provides a unique daily fitness, companionship and outdoor exercise service for dogs. Activities include running, hiking, swimming, fetching, rolling, romping, or just plain strolling. They also provide weekly Adventure Day trips to keep your dog in shape.

- **Canine Fitness Center in Crownsville, MD** - This center offers indoor swimming, fun and fitness, and provides a wide variety of services and products geared toward improving and maintaining the health of canines.

- **Northern Virginia Animal Swim Center in Middleburg, VA** - At this center dogs swim indoors for health and conditioning. Trainers teach dogs lap swimming for strength and endurance. Horses are also welcome.

- **Running Paws in New York, NY** - The center provides urban dogs with the daily exercise they need to help enhance their health, happiness, and overall quality of life. Endurance athletes run with the dogs on a regular schedule.

- **Fido Fitness in Calabasas, CA** - Provides a personal fitness trainer and pet sitter.

- **Urban Dog Fitness & Spa in Toronto, Canada** - Provides dog play groups and an athletic activity area; also allows owners to see what their dog is up to on the web cam.

- **Dunkin Dawgs K-9 Swim Center in Janesville, WI** - Dogs can swim in still water or, for more exercise, can swim against a controlled water flow provided by swim jets in a larger pool.
Current Pet Fitness Centers, Successes and Failures: (KS)

Other examples of thriving pet fitness facilities include places such as Canine Fitness and Fun Center, Canine Fitness Center, K9 Jym, and Camp Bow Wow USA. These are spread out across the United States, and other countries also have their own versions of these fitness centers. These fitness centers have all seen great success since their creation. The main reason that each succeeded is actually a combination of three things. One, a solid business plan which they followed dutifully from the start. Two, a need locally for such a center, along with being either the most well-known or only pet fitness center in the area. Third, asking reasonable prices for services rendered, as well as offering discounts for returning customers.

Financials (SH)

Using a rough estimate based on the financials of other pet business that provide both pet fitness and daycare, we found the net worth of these businesses to be around $25,000. The total investment for these companies was between $18,000 and $50,000. Factors contributing to the total investment include the initial start-up cost for the property and various equipment (swimming pool, treadmill, underwater treadmill, and obstacles). Another is the payroll for the different types of employees, like the trainers, daycare personnel, managers/supervisors, custodians and an adjunct veterinarian. Advertisement was also a big part of the investment made by many businesses. They advertised in newsletters, internet, and ad slicks. Other miscellaneous expenses would include employee training, security/safety procedures, phone line and the Grand opening. The prices for everything can change depending on the location of the property.

Business Plan (KS)

For our project to succeed, we developed a business plan that is focused both on maintaining the business and asking a reasonable fee for services rendered to promote and encourage use of our facilities by families of all income levels. We will need to look at the cost of land, building materials and any contracting out for modeling/remodeling, advertising, equipment, and payroll.

First and foremost, we need to find a place to set up our business and either a building to remodel or space to build the area we need. Because of our need for enough space per dog kenneled as well as the need for open, large areas for play time and fitness, we would require at least half an acre of land if we wish to have fifty dogs (figuring about fifty to seventy-five square feet for each dog when in outdoor play areas; an equal amount when in the indoor fitness center; space for break room, entry way, clinic room, grooming salon, and a space specifically for training workshops; and between three and seven square feet of kennel space for dogs spending the night, depending on size of the dog in question, up to one acre for one hundred dogs (amount of dogs in attendance will be based on amount of staff present, no more than ten dogs per staff member). If necessary, more space can be purchased as business improves.

Our most important goal after having a building will be to advertise. As we will be looking for clientele among pet owners and employees among pet-friendly associates, we should focus our advertising in ways that will reach this demographic. This can be done through handing out
flyers at dog parks, vets, and pet stores as well as having ads printed in newspapers or pet-friendly magazines. We can also partner up with local vets or dog food/toy companies both for advertising and sharing clientele.

In order to keep our fees reasonable, there should be certain benefits for being a frequent customer, such as discounts on rates or free events or workshops to fit that particular family’s needs or interests. For instance, a family who has a long-haired dog that is a frequent customer may receive a discount for any grooming the dog may require. Likewise, we can work with families on a more personal level to help come up with a services plan that will fit their particular needs and budget. This will both develop a relationship with our customers and encourage them to continue coming to us for service.

All of our equipment should be kept in the same area, with tests run at least weekly to ensure all are in top condition so as to avoid any injuries. As we will have a pool area, we shall also allow for first-time swimmers to be accompanied by their owner and a single lifeguard while other dogs are kept out of the pool to check whether the first-timer cares for the water. If not, there will be no charge for trying out the pool and our fitness advisors will offer other fitness alternatives to swimming.

Our employees will be made up partially of paid employees (those with more training, such as groomers, fitness advisors/trainers, nutritionists, therapists, and/or veterinarians) and volunteers who will have the chance of moving onto a paid position as they gain more training. All our staff will be required to learn our emergency plan, dog body language, breeds, play styles, and be certified in basic first aid and CPR for animals, then will be assigned to a maximum of ten dogs at the facility that day. They will mainly be in charge of those dogs, but should be available to help should another staff member need assistance in calming one of their dogs. Our volunteers will be offered incentives for joining our staff, such as discounts on services, free boarding, and, if we have a partnership with a local vet or dog food/toy company, vouchers for discounts for these, as well.

**Suggested Price List for Our Facility (KS)**

In order to maintain a competitive price while in our start-up phase, our thinking would be to offer prices comparable to the listings for a similar fitness center, Canine Fitness and Fun Center. We have included a price list for daycare, training, pet retreats, boarding, swimming, and rehab (see Appendix 1).

**Why Help Out Our Pets? (JR)**

Pets, specifically dogs, offer a lot of health benefits to their owners, children, and families as a whole. Studies have found that pets can lower blood pressure, anxiety, can provide a means of exercise for their owners when taken on walks, as well as many other health benefits. With all that our pets unknowingly do for their owners, it is the responsibility of these owners to return the favor by maintaining the health and fitness of their pets. Dogs are creatures that have been used for thousands of years to accomplish tasks like hunting and herding. In today’s society, domesticated dogs do not receive the type of exercise that their ancestors did. It is not
necessarily the owner's fault, but pet owners need to be aware that a regular exercise regimen can help their pets in various ways. According to the ASPCA, lack of exercise in dogs can result in:

- Destructive, chewing, digging or scratching
- Hyperactivity, excitability, and night-time activity
- Attention-getting behaviors like barking and whining

There are numerous other problems that can result but these are the ones that stand out as the most common that owners experience with their pets. Our facility will look to potentially resolve all pets of these problems through our fitness treatment.

There are many reasons why your pet would need to improve their fitness or need rehabilitation. Reuters reported a shocking statistic showing that 53% of all older dogs are obese. Most pets are overweight because they are over-fed and given food other than their dog food. Most owners except the fact that their pet is overweight and do nothing about it. On the other hand, there are concerned owners that want to put their pets on a diet and help them lose weight but just do not know the best way to go about it. With our fitness plan, owners can bring their pets to our facility and have them engage in a one of a kind hands-on experience that will guarantee their weight loss.

Our fitness center would also help individual pets rehab from injuries. The most common injury to a pet is to their leg. A leg injury to an animal, if treated improperly, can lead to a decline a physical health for the rest of their life. Our staff and facility would be equipped to handle any injury the pet may and have and help rehabilitate it to best of our ability.

???above- is it the leg or hip dysplasia?

**Fitness Plan (JR)**

We plan to design our fitness center so that it is state of the art and includes the following:

- **Treadmills**
  - At a reasonable pace, our treadmills will work to keep the dogs stable and moving while at the same time reducing anxiety and improving obedience.

- **Underwater Treadmills**
  - Revolutionary piece of equipment that will help the dogs adjust to the shallow water and optimize the conditioning sessions based on the dog’s age, weight, and exercise potential.

- **Aquatic Training**
The water can be very frightening to a lot of dogs so aquatic training, although it is part of the facility, will not be included in the 6-week program because we are looking to reduce the anxiety of these dogs, not create it.

Aquatic training, however, can be very useful and is a great hands-on experience for the owner to get involved with their pet.

**Outdoor Running/Walking Track**

The outdoor running/walking track is a crucial part of the fitness plan because it not only gets the dog outdoors exercising, but will also prove useful to owners whose pets are very aggressive when on the leash.

**An obstacle course with cones and stairs designed to train agility**

The obstacle course will also be very useful, especially towards the end of the fitness plan.

It works as a good indicator of the dog’s agility and obedience, both of which are qualities emphasized during the fitness plan.

Ideally, our fitness plan is a 6-week program (see Appendix 2), but we hope to accommodate pets that need more extensive, long-term help. We learned from our reading about other successful pet fitness facilities that aquatic training is one of the most effective means of fitness. The underwater treadmill “utilizes the water to optimize conditioning sessions based on the individual needs of the dog;” which directly relates to our mission of offering personalized service.

However, if aquatic training is not suitable for the pet, then we would offer other means of exercise or fitness. It is very important to figure out what type of fitness regime is best for their pet because no two dogs or cats are the same. We also would be looking to schedule sessions in which the owners and their pets can exercise effectively together.

Another important concept is our need for obedience. We are not just physically exercising these pets but we also want to improve them mentally. Many dogs do not have a high attention span. In order to maximize training and attention, the program will be broken up into 3 sessions per week on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This gives the dogs a day of rest in between. Appendix 2 shows our idealized standard 6-week plan which would cost $110.

**Parent-Pet Retreats**

In a previous section, we detailed our business plan in full, but here we shall pinpoint the precise issues we wish to fulfill with this new business. First and foremost, we want to make a safe place for pets to exercise and rehab to prevent unhealthy weight gain and recover from injuries that could potentially cause further problems if left unchecked. Secondly, we want to extend this
opportunity for the pet owners, as well, to do our part in fighting the obesity epidemic in America.

In addition to our idea for a new pet fitness and rehab center, we would also like to start up parent and pet retreats and play days. These would be weekend-long trips (or day trips, depending on availability and group size) where pets and their owners can bond together and with other pet lovers over hiking, playing, and even camping and other outdoor activities. The goal of these retreats would be to encourage more active lifestyles for both pet and owner along with establishing a stronger bond between the two and within the group attending the events.

References

Sections 1, 2, and 3:


Section 4:


Section 5:


Section 6:


Section 7:


Sections 8 and 9:
Appendix 1: Price Lists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DAYCARE</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Day</td>
<td>$25-30 per dog</td>
<td>$20-23 for multiple dogs</td>
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<td>Half Day</td>
<td>$20 per dog</td>
<td>$17 for multiple dogs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Half Day and Half Hour Swim</td>
<td>$25-28 per dog</td>
<td>$20-23 for multiple dogs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two Hour Play Groups</td>
<td>$10-12 per dog</td>
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<td>Hourly Play</td>
<td>$5 per hour after the minimum 2 hours</td>
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<th><strong>SWIM ONLY</strong></th>
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<td>Half Hour Group Swim</td>
<td>$8-10 per dog</td>
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<td>Twenty Minute Private Swim</td>
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<td>Half Hour Private Swim Group</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DAYCARE PLUS SWIM</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Half Day with Swim</td>
<td>$25-28 per dog</td>
<td>$20-23 for multiple dogs</td>
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<td>Half Hour Group Swim, Full Day</td>
<td>$30-33 per dog</td>
<td>$27-30 for multiple dogs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Hour Group Swim, Full Day</td>
<td>$35-38 per dog</td>
<td>$30-33 for multiple dogs</td>
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<th><strong>POWER PLAY (TWO HOUR SWIM AND PLAY)</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Hour Play, Half Hour Swim</td>
<td>$15-17 per dog</td>
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<th><strong>TRAINING</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Six Week Session</td>
<td>$110 per dog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Lessons</td>
<td>$125 per dog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended Lessons (Past Six Weeks)</td>
<td>$20 per week, negotiable based on necessity</td>
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<th><strong>REHAB</strong></th>
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<td>Physical Therapy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slim-Down</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent-Pet Workout</td>
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### PARENT-PET RETREATS

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Saturday Only</th>
<th>Saturday and Sunday</th>
<th>Full Weekend</th>
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<td></td>
<td>$20 per dog</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$15 for multiple dogs</td>
<td>$25 for multiple dogs</td>
<td>$40 for multiple dogs</td>
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**Appendix 2: Sample Training Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Session</th>
<th>Session 1 (Monday, 1 Hour)</th>
<th>Session 2 (Wednesday, 1 Hour)</th>
<th>Session 3 (Friday, 90 minutes)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td><strong>Treadmill:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outdoor Walking (On-Leash):</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outdoor Running (On-Leash):</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-The purpose of this first session is to get the dog adjusted to walking on a treadmill at a very slow pace.</td>
<td>-Gets the dog acclimated to the outdoor track making sure they don’t run off or interfere with other dogs.</td>
<td>-Allowing the dog to briefly sprint around the track getting them their first real cardio during week one.</td>
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<td>-As the dog begins to get comfortable the speed will be increased.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td><strong>Treadmill:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Underwater Treadmill:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Obedience Training:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Increase the speed of the treadmill to a light jog but still relatively slow.</td>
<td>-The first experience with the underwater treadmill is to get them adjusted and comfortable with it so it can be of good use later in the process.</td>
<td>-Taking a break from the physical aspect, dogs will be taught basic tricks, obedience and get a chance to socialize with other dogs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td><strong>Fetch Training:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outdoor Walking (Off-Leash):</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outdoor Running (Off-Leash):</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>-This works as both a physical exercise as well as an obedience test.</td>
<td>-See how well the dogs do on the track without a leash, walk with them at a slow pace.</td>
<td>-Allow the dogs to run the track without a leash making sure they are following procedure.</td>
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<td>-A dog that can successfully play fetch is well trained.</td>
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**Week 4**

**Obedience Training:**
- Examine progress made from the first obedience training session.

**Underwater Treadmill:**
- The second underwater treadmill session will be effective cardio allowing the dog to use muscles and get exercise in a way they haven’t before.

**Obstacle Course (On-leash)**
- Introduce the obstacle course to the dogs for the first time on the leash, showing them how to perform it properly.

**Week 5**

**Stairs Training:**
- Maneuvering stairs is not only part of the obstacle course but an important daily task of most pets.
- Dogs will be taught how to properly go up and down stairs.

**Underwater Treadmill:**
- This is the last underwater treadmill session in which the dogs progress and mastery should have greatly improved.

**Obstacle Course (Off-Leash, Timed):**
- Dogs will be on the course and timed without a leash for the first time.

**Week 6**

**Outdoor Running/Walking (Optional):**
- This is an optional relaxed session where the dogs are free to run or walk to track among themselves.
- Dogs that need more practice on the obstacle course can also receive that.

**Obedience Test:**
- Each dog’s obedience will be tested by seeing who can perform the basic tricks (sit, paw, lay down, fetch, etc.).
- Compare results to previous obedience training.

**Obstacle Course (Timed/Compared):**
- In the final session, owners will be able to see all the progress their pet has made and watch them perform their final obstacle course which will be time and hopefully improved from the previous week.

**Letters to the Editor:**

Sent to the NJ Star-Ledger

Mr. Moran,

My name is Jake Rosenthal and I’m currently a fourth year student at Rutgers University taking my junior/senior colloquium as assigned by the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. My group and I are designing a pet fitness facility where owners can bring their pets with the hope to better their overall physicality. Our facility is looking to include top notch equipment and staff to ensure that each pet shows progress. We are looking to include outdoor play areas, an indoor fitness facility, a clinic room, a grooming salon, and space specific to
training workshops. Obesity among pets has become a growing problem, especially pets that are in their later years. The primary function of our facility is to extend the life of those pets, allow them to return to a stable weight, and in some cases rehabilitate their injuries. Although there are several pet fitness and well-being centers in this country, we as a group believe that it is both a thriving and useful business that can benefit everyone involved.

As an editor of a newspaper as established as the Star-Ledger, we are looking for your assistance in any way in order to get the word of our new facility out in the tri-state area. Any advertisement or mention of our newfound business would be extremely helpful and much appreciated. If you have any further questions you can contact me at jakero@rutgers.edu or by phone at ————. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jake Rosenthal

Sent to the Gloucester County Times

To the Editor:

Since obesity has become such an epidemic in our nation, there have been many ideas and theories on how to fight it back, to make America healthier. But the truth is, the obesity epidemic is affecting more than just our citizens, it can affect our pets, too. Dogs and cats, whether it be from overfeeding or from not offering enough exercise and play time, have been getting more and more overweight alongside their owners, even to the point where certain pet food brands are coming up with Fat Dog/Cat diets! Our nation has become more about retroactively trying to fix the problem rather than proactively working to keep it from becoming a problem in the first place.

There is, however, an easy solution that can potentially help with the obesity issue in both people and animals. Pet fitness facilities and even dog day cares are designed to give your dog exercise and play throughout the day to maintain a proper body weight and shape. In several of these places, they also offer pet-parent play times, as well, offering to teach the owners some of the exercises they can do with their animals. These include everything from walks to swimming to playing fetch, all easily done and not necessarily anything that someone would have to go too far out of their way to accomplish.

The main reason that people do not take advantage of these facilities is that they honestly do not know they are available. In fact, there is one such place, Camp Bow Wow USA, that has facilities in many cities in New Jersey, the closest being in Cherry Hill. If more people knew that such a facility existed where they and their pets could have a place to play and even exercise together, there would not be such a huge problem with both human and animal obesity in our nation.
To the Editor,

Pet obesity is a serious problem in our household pets today. Some owners lack the time and energy after work to provide their pets with the activity it needs to stay fit. So approximately over 52.5% of US Dogs are either overweight or obese and approximately 58.3% of US Cats are overweight or obese. The main problem is that obesity can lead to many other life threatening illness such as Arthritis, Diabetes mellitus, Lameness and Heart disease just to name a few. And this disorder is the number one preventable medical condition. By maintaining a healthy weight, proper nutrition, and physical activity people can ensure that their pets live longer, healthier, and pain-free lives. To help combat pet obesity, we need the help and support of many dedicated pet owners for the development of a local pet fitness center where you and your dog can both get fit. Join us on February 22, 2014 for national walking the dog day and donate to the making of a wonderful facility.

Shakim Holmes