

Tell your dog to take a hike!

Dog hiking company goes above & beyond

By Staff

Melanie Barnes gets a lot of comments from fellow hikers at South Mountain. Some suggest she get a sled, some make comparisons to the Dog Whisperer, many shake their heads in amazement; but the four or five dogs with Melanie always bring a smile to people's faces.



"Most people are impressed at how well they get along with each other", says Barnes, adding, "Of course, that's by design. I screen all canine clients, put groups together based on compatibility, and maintain a pack leader attitude which lets them know that I am the one in charge."

Barnes started Four Paws Adventures in October 2006 to serve the Southeast Valley. The company offers weekday group dog hikes which include pick-up and drop-off; an hour and a half of exercise; socialization; and reinforcement of basic commands, such as sit and stay.

In celebration of Four Paws Adventures second anniversary, the business is expanding to the North and West Valley. Jamie DeBenedetto covers the North and West Valley. DeBenedetto brings her thirteen years of experience as a professional dog trainer and her self-professed hiking addiction to Four Paws Adventures. DeBenedetto says she's excited "about how much better this level of exercise is for dogs that really need a physical challenge and the mental stimulation of different environments. Insufficient exercise is the most common cause of behavioral problems that I see as a trainer."

The inspiration for Four Paws came from Barnes own high-energy pup, Pita. A walk around the block was never enough for Pita,

an athletic mixed breed. While hiking with Pita, Barnes realized that there are many dog owners who want to satisfy their dog's fitness and fun needs, but are too busy or are physically unable to do so. Traditional dog walkers don't offer the

exercise intensity or exposure to other dogs and locations that many dogs need to stay healthy, confident, and happy. And, doggie daycare is not the right fit for many dogs. "I knew people who had tried daycare and their dog hated it. And when you think about it, wouldn't you rather be outside in the fresh air than in an overcrowded concrete room?" asks Barnes.

One of the most popular features of the service is the website photo gallery. Pictures are taken on every trip and busy pet parents can see their dog's excursion in their pooch's personalized album. The gallery is fun to peruse even if you don't have a dog enrolled in the program – there are over eight thousand photos of happy smiling dogs sure to make any dog-lover smile too. The pictures make client Teresa Stewart smile too. "I've been using Four Paws Adventures for two years. My Jack Russell Terrier, Otis, loves his Tuesday and Friday hiking trips! Otis is very high energy, but is definitely more mellow on the evenings after a hike. I can't wait to go online and see the pictures of my little buddy having a great time!"

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Four Paws Adventures is insured, bonded, and pet first aid certified, and is the proud recipient of the 2008 Sonoran Tails Reader's Choice award for Best Dog Walker. More information can be found at FourPawsAdventures.com, or by calling 602617-6419.