

*April 2011*

# Dog-running services spring up nationwide

Does your dog love running but you don't? Well, now you can pay someone to run with your dog, helping her to shed a few extra pounds or burn off excess energy.

Dog-running services are becoming increasingly popular all over the country, including cities like Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia and New York. In fact, Sittercity.com, a website that connects families with a pet-related business, saw nearly 30 percent increase of dog-running businesses sign up in 2010.

"It's a service that a lot of people just can't do themselves because they're at work or school, or they physically can't do what we can do for their dogs," says triathlete John Reh of Dogs Love Running, which operates in several Chicago suburbs.

Unfortunately, most pets today don't get enough exercise to help them stay slim. A 2009 national survey of veterinarians by the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention found that 45 percent of dogs were overweight or obese. That's up 2 percent from the previous year. Most active dogs, regardless of size or breed, can make good running partners, says canine sports medicine Liz Devitt.

However, there are a few exceptions. She says giant breeds (such as Great Danes and Mastiffs) shouldn't run because it's bad for their hips and short-nosed dogs (like Pugs and Boston Terriers) won't be able to breathe properly.

Also puppies should not run on a regular basis until their growth plates are fully closed. In small breeds those bones finish growing around 8 months of age, she says, and in larger breeds, it's 12 to 18 months. Running a young dog too soon makes him more prone to injuries – such as cruciate ligament tears – as an adult, Devitt says.

Reh customizes each workout, lasting up to an hour, based on the dog's health, age, and ability. Most dogs seem to do well with a half-hour run, two to three times a week, he says. A modified GPS device is taken along, upon request, to record the route, distance, and pace during the workout. The information is then emailed to clients at the end of each week.

If there's not a dog running service in your area, one might just open soon. Reh is currently franchising his business model nationwide.