

Happy hour at Sniff Dog, where people pay and dogs are free

By Wendy Gordon

Just to be clear, the café at Sniff Dog Hotel is for people.

It's a fair question to ask at a place where dogs stay overnight in their own "hotel" rooms, complete with window views and flat-screen TVs. When I saw the banner advertising "Happy Hour," I had images of miniature poodles sipping martinis.

Since I'm not a dog owner, I recruited a curious neighbor and her Australian-shepherd-mix puppy so I could pass as a typical patron.

The Sniff Café is open six days a week serving coffee beverages, wine, beer and snacks. The six food items include pepperoni pizza (\$9), bleu cheese on bread (\$7), Tillamook cheese with tomato soup (\$6.50), large pretzel (\$5), hummus on pita bread (\$4) and chips and salsa (\$3).

But what about that happy hour? Unlike most happy hours, the Sniff Café offers no discounts on their food or drink offerings. The deal is two hours of free dog care from



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Brandi Sapp (L-R), Brittany Taskey with her dog Lexi, and Sniff co-owner Casey Murry unwind with appetizers and drinks.



JULIE KEEFE

All the attention in the tiny café is on the dogs on the other side of the window. Co-owner Casey Murry, wearing an apron, keeps watch.

5-7 p.m., Monday-Saturday. Considering that their standard rate for daycare is \$9 an hour, that beats most any happy hour offer around.

You have to keep that in mind while working through the paperwork. My neighbor Andrea had to fill out numerous forms about her puppy's (also named Wendy) medical history and personal predilections comparable to enrolling one's child in school.

Then she needed to bring her in for a "temperament check" prior to happy hour.

At the check, a staff member asked a few questions, then squired Wendy away for observation. Wendy, according to Andrea, is a human-oriented dog, not particularly interested in playing with her peers. But she is sweet and obedient, and passed her test easily.

You can't leave the site while your dog revels in happy hour, but you can relax with a drink and/or snack while watching the canines romp in the indoor play yard.

The café offers a decent selection of wines and beer and large portions of pleas-

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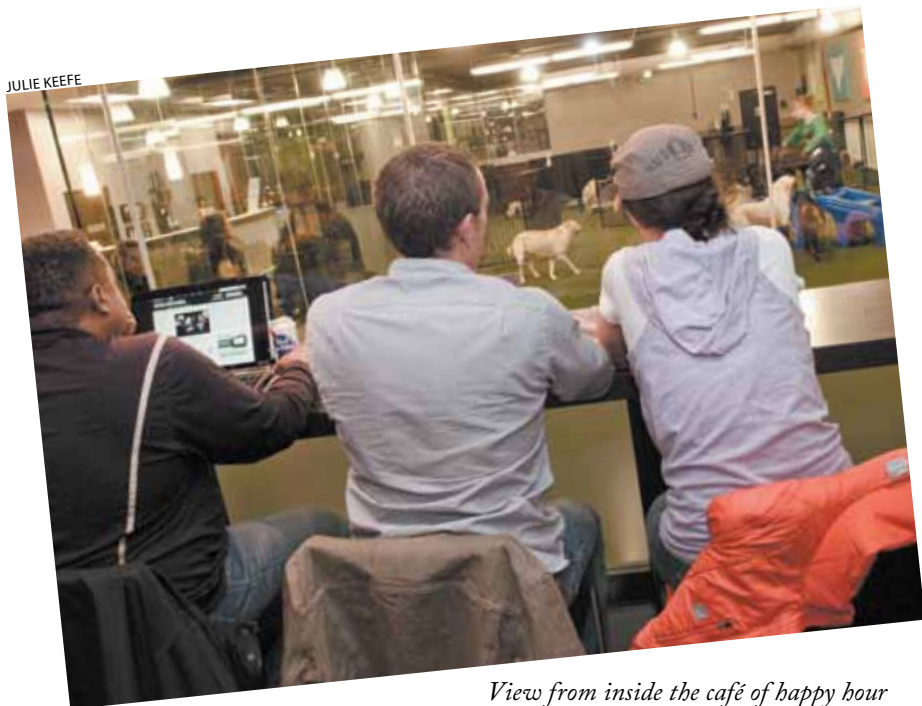
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View from inside the café of happy hour patrons enjoying peace and quiet while keeping an eye on their charges in the dog play area.

ant snacks, such as pepperoni pizza, chips and salsa and a toasted baguette topped with honey and a generous crumble of bleu cheese.

The menu “recommends” a two-drink minimum, which seemed a mite heavy on the alcohol for the average weekday afternoon, especially since almost everyone drives to Sniff Dog Hotel. Fortunately, that recommendation seemed neither enforced nor followed; at least half the patrons were sipping the least expensive option, a can of PBR.

On warm, sunny afternoons, the café opens up for sidewalk seating. At those times, your dog can sit with you and enjoy treats, such as organic sweet potato chews and free-range, grass-fed beef tendons.

The formula works for many dogs and their owners. The café was jammed when Andrea, Wendy and I visited, but if you’re lucky, you can garner a seat at the inward facing window or sit on a bench with a view of the play yard. If your view is unsatisfactory, you can even watch a live webcam on your smart phone. Wendy spent most of her time quietly observing, coming alive when one of the attendants petted her or engaged her in play. Towards the end of her stay, she got up the courage to join some other dogs.

The scene reminded me of a human playground. The participant’s motivations

were similar to those of human parents: to get out the house, socialize, and give their charges some exercise. Dog owners sat and chatted, talked on the phone or worked at their laptops while their dogs played.

The dogs were a very attractive, well-groomed and well-behaved bunch. I enjoyed seeing so many interesting breeds. On this rainy afternoon, most participants I spoke to found Sniff Dog Hotel a pleasant alternative to the mucky Wallace Park off-leash area. They praised Portland’s dog friendliness.

Sniff Hotel has recognized a need and is filling it well. Andrea, who has her hands full caring for two human babies, was initially skeptical of the happy hour idea. But after seeing the clean, friendly environment, she was won over.

“I think I’ll be back,” she said, as Wendy wagged her tail and settled into the back of the car.

Sniff Dog Hotel Café

1828 NW Raleigh St.
503-208-2366

Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-7 p.m.
Saturday 9 a.m.-7 p.m.

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