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by Sandy Siegel

Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? Phoenix residents and pet-industry veterans Maggie Brown and Tina Myers did just that when they launched their canine-care business, **Sleepover Rover**, in early 2005. Not exactly your father's dog-sitting service, Sleepover Rover operates a network of host families who open up their homes--and hearts--to clients' pooches, providing personalized care in a safe environment.

"It began like most good business concepts begin," Myers says. "With a need." The idea was fueled by an ad Brown placed in a local paper, asking for someone to take her dog into their home when Brown traveled. She found a retiree who gave her pup the attention, space and security she couldn't find in kennels and other boarding facilities.

"I thought, there have to be other people out there like me who need a better solution for care for their pets," Brown says. "And certainly, there's got to be people like Gale, who would enjoy the company of another person's dog, and maybe could benefit from making some extra money doing this on the side."

Brown brainstormed the idea with good friend and fellow dog-lover Myers, and Sleepover Rover was born. In less than two years, the business has already produced quite a "litter," with five new locations in four states and more plans for expansion.

Each location launch starts with, well, a dogged search for host families--through ads, networking and referrals from animal-care professionals. Hosts must have a yard and be available full-time, making it a perfect sideline gig for dog-loving retirees, stay-at-home parents and home-based workers. Those who meet the rigorous criteria are added to the company database. Customers interested in booking sleepovers are matched with the best home-away-from-home for their pets.

Sleepover Rover seems to be barking up the right tree. "The hosts love the customers, the customers love the hosts, and everybody loves the dogs," Myers says.

"The repeat business is phenomenal," Brown adds. "Once they use us, they never go back."

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