

Airport seeks operator to build pet hotel

Facility would offer new amenity, provide revenue

BY SHELDON S. SHAFER • SSHAFER@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • JUNE 8, 2009

Airport officials are seeking a private operator to build and manage a "pet-boarding hotel and resort" near Louisville International Airport.

The Louisville Regional Airport Authority wants to offer another amenity to the flying public and also is looking for another source of nontraditional revenue, said authority Executive Director Skip Miller.

The authority might negotiate a lease so it gets a share of the receipts, he said.

Airport kennels are fairly new but seem to be a viable concern, Miller said.

The authority recently advertised for what would be competitive proposals to develop the boarding facility. Responses are due July 6.

Miller said that, on the best schedule, the authority directors might be able to consider a deal with a developer in September, with the facility constructed and ready to open by mid-2010.

The authority is offering about two acres it owns in the 4200 block of Park Boulevard, about a mile from the airport and just off Crittenden Drive, to lease for the project.

The development cost would be borne by the operator.

The solicitation published last week in The Courier-Journal indicated that the pet hotel "is to provide first-class, pet-boarding services, including ... day-care, boarding facilities, grooming, exercise and recreational services, retail shop, pickup and dropoff services and other amenities" to air travelers and to airlines.

Miller said the business could accommodate almost any pet owner, not just air travelers. He said, for instance, it could serve visitors flying into Louisville who have brought pets with them and plan to stay at hotels that don't allow animals.

Airports with pet-boarding facilities include Chicago's O'Hare and airports in Minneapolis, Orlando, San Diego and Seattle.

Pet Paradise, a relatively new chain, operates pet-boarding facilities at or near airports in Jacksonville, Fla., and New Orleans and at two airports in Houston.

The chain plans to open two more facilities soon at airports in Charlotte, N.C., and Tallahassee, Fla., said Christin Goldsmith, the assistant manager of the Jacksonville facility. Members of her family founded and operate the chain.

"We're doing well, from a business standpoint," she said of the facilities.

She said she doesn't know if her family would be interested in pursuing the Louisville project.

The Jacksonville site opened in 2004 and gets about 60 percent of its customer base from air travelers, she said. The facility charges an owner \$34 a night to board the first dog and \$22 for the first cat. Services include grooming, and each pet suite has both inside and outside space.

Kyle Williams, owner of the All About Pets Animal Resort on Chenoweth Run Road near Jeffersontown, said about a third of his clientele is air travelers. He said he "can't imagine dragging both luggage and a pet" to the airport at the same time.

"I'm sure people would use it, and it might be successful," Williams said, but he speculated that an airport pet boarding center would be pricey because "anything you buy at the airport is pretty expensive."

Williams said his rates vary by pet size, but the basic price is \$15.25 for the first dog and \$11.25 for the first cat.

Andrew Ruckriegel, general manager of PetSuites in Middletown, said about 80 percent of the boarding facility's business is with people who board their pet when they leave town. He said a boarding facility near the airport "makes sense."

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