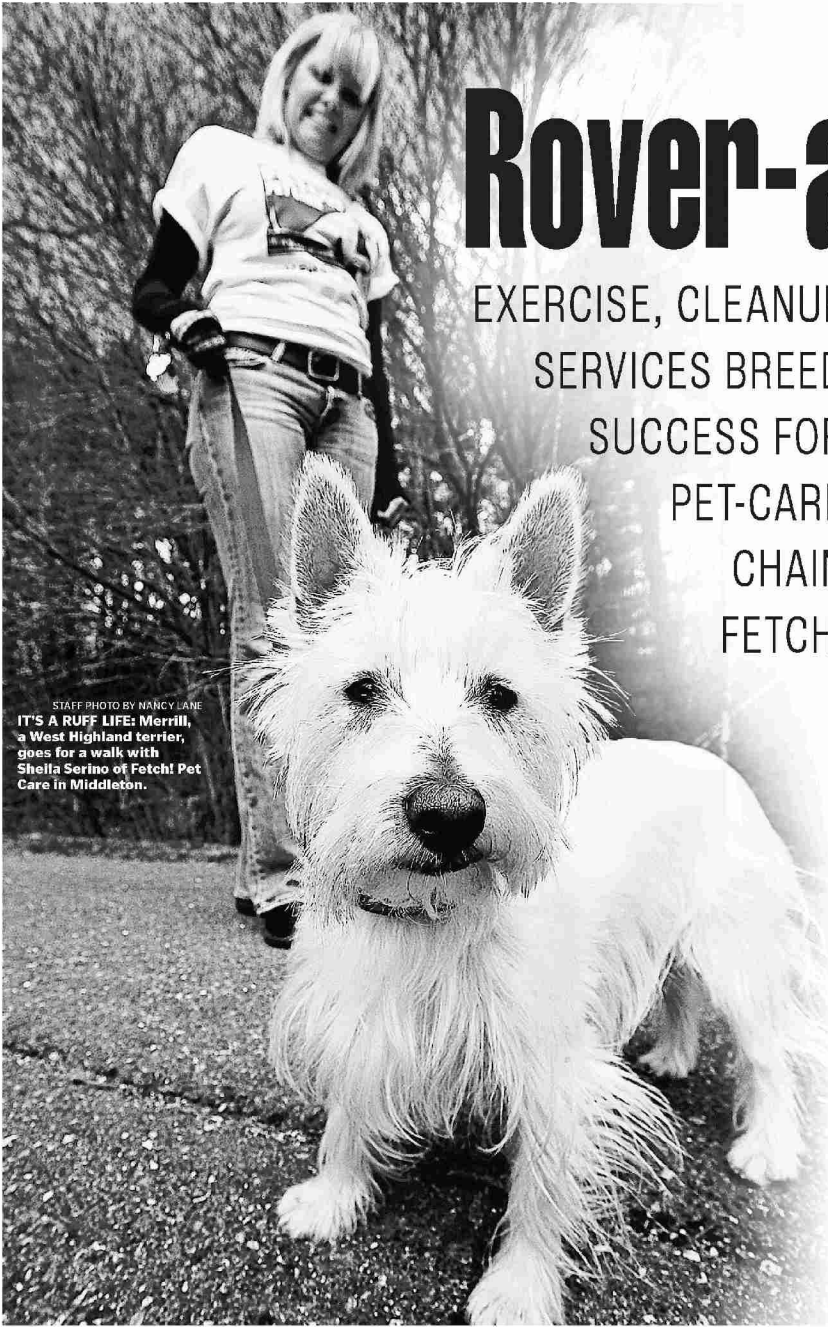


# Rover-achiever

EXERCISE, CLEANUP  
SERVICES BREED  
SUCCESS FOR  
PET-CARE  
CHAIN  
FETCH!

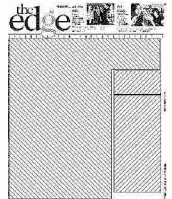
STAFF PHOTO BY MANCEY LANE  
**IT'S A RUFF LIFE:** Merrill, a West Highland terrier, goes for a walk with Sheila Sorino of Fetch! Pet Care in Middleton.



By **MICHAEL MAROTTA**

**B**etween her two 30-minute walks, impromptu play date with a boxer named Tyson and fetch, 3-year-old Merrill has a busy Monday afternoon.

Merrill, a West Highland white terrier from Middleton, is one of a growing number of animals getting daily exercise and attention from Fetch! Pet Care, a chain of professional pet handlers that could soon make the kid next door obsolete.



"We wanted to create a professional brand," said Fetch CEO Paul Mann. "The future of the industry is a brand-name provider people can trust."

The find-a-need-and-fill-it niche for Fetch is its myriad services — it offers exercise programs, in-home pet care, pet waste pickup and even out-of-state housing so pets can accompany families on vacations.

After a successful career developing Internet software, Mann started Fetch in Berkeley, Calif., in 2002. Within two years, he was franchising out, and now oversees representatives in 34 states. Bay State branches are in Dedham and Middleton, with a Brookline/Wellesley operation preparing for a summer launch. Franchisees and sitters go through extensive background checks and up to six months of training.

"It's the love of animals that drives people into this kind of work," said Middleton franchise owner Tess Lundberg.

One client, Tom Fraser of Middleton, found Fetch via Craigslist.org. After his teenage neighbor left for college, Fraser needed someone to watch his 6-year-old Chinese crested-poodle mix and 7-year-old cocker spaniel. And he wanted someone to do more than just let the dog run around in his back yard, as was sometimes the case with the neighbor.

"It costs more than the girl next door, but it's worth it," Fraser said.

Private dog walks are \$16 to \$25 per outing, while daily small pet visits cost up to \$22. Doggie day care can run upward of \$50 daily, and pet baths and yard waste cleanup cost \$10 to \$22. In-home sitting is \$45 to \$65 per overnight, and private boarding is about the same.

According to Fetch, 19 percent of owners bring pets on vacation with them, while 5 percent bring critters into the workplace. That leaves most of the day for Fido or Sheeba to lounge around without exercise, fattening them up and stockpiling pent-up aggression and energy.

"One in four pets in America is obese, following what's going on with humans," said Mann. "And it's not just a physical issue, it's mental."

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