



Dogs Gone Green

By Grant Garl

The idea for Fit 'n' Furry was born two years ago. Being pet lovers, my wife, Marci, and I understood our daughter's dilemma when she explained there was no place she felt comfortable leaving her pet when traveling. We felt ours was a unique idea that would work because pet lovers, in particular, possess a special commitment to preserving the environment.

When we dreamed of opening a luxury pet oasis, our primary vision was that it would be an environmentally sound project. During my 34 years in the heating and ventilation industry, I'd witnessed such inefficient uses of environmental resources that I was determined this project wouldn't go the same route. I knew I'd accomplished my mission when our facility was celebrated and certified as Petaluma's first "All Green Commercial Building."

How we greened the building

Instead of building new, we reused an existing building, which conserved land, resources and infrastructure. Our 17,000-square-foot facility is outfitted with energy-efficient equipment, and most demolition waste during construction was fully recycled. We used metal studs from recycled steel and non-formaldehyde insulation. We prepped the structure for our future solar water heating and electrical energy plans.

Because we're an indoor facility, air quality is vital. There were no toxins in the paint, insulation or other building materials used. To ensure the highest air quality and create less pollutants and allergens, we installed a state-of-the-art ventilation system. The roof-mounted system has an environmentally friendly device called "The Economizer," which brings in fresh outside air and expels stale air to heat or cool the building. As a result, we use much less energy.

How to be green every day

Building green was only the first step. Actually operating the systems in accordance with our environmental commitment took a lot of strategic planning and implementation tactics. Fit 'n' Furry has enlisted many green practices that any business can adopt.

All our cleaning and washing solutions are completely biodegradable. All the disposable paper products we use, such as paper towels, napkins and even tissues, are made from recycled paper. We have our own built-in recycling center to recycle all aluminum, plastic, glass, cardboard, paper, junk mail and magazines. Every effort is made to find new ways to reuse materials—we reprocess a substantial portion of newspaper by using them to line the litter pans in our kitty condos.

Once you've installed energy-conserving fixtures and appliances, they need to be used correctly for full efficiency. Devices like programmable thermostats are great, but you still need to proactively tour the building during business hours to monitor and adjust them. At the end of the day, we have a 50-point checklist to make sure HVAC, lighting and appliances are turned on or off according to need. Our high-efficiency lighting has two levels, and depending on our occupancy, we operate exhaust fans and our "economizers" to exchange old air with new, fresh air to naturally cool the building overnight.

Water conservation

Another way to preserve natural resources is through water use. At Fit 'n' Furry, all sinks, showers, toilets and mop stations have low-flow devices installed. Grooming tubs have closeable drains; we fill the tub with a few inches of water, but then a spa pump recirculates the water. Normally when washing Fido, most of the shampoo runs right down the drain. We put the shampoo directly into the water, the pump distributes it, then we simply rinse with a couple gallons of fresh water and we're done. After bath time, our furry friends are dried with a high-velocity blower, which saves on laundering towels and uses less electricity than hot air dryers.

Our Aqua Air wet/dry vacuum appliances save water and air quality. Normally, to clean a 500-square-foot area, you'd use a hose running at least 100 gallons of water. Our system uses a cleaning solution and only 10 gallons of water. Then we vacuum it up rather than washing it down the drain.

Shangri-la for pets

Fit 'n' Furry has created the ultimate comforting "guest" experience. We offer large playroom/training areas, which are lined with recycled tire flooring for cushy comfort under paws; roomy, decorated suites and kitty condos; a full-service grooming spa; an XM satellite sound system, flat screen TVs and webcams installed throughout so concerned parents can check-in and monitor anytime. Exercise, play groups and personalized play sessions are scheduled throughout the day.

Committed to community

It only costs about 5 percent above traditional expenses to build green, and the benefit clearly outweighs the cost and efforts. Our rewards come not only from utility conservation and long-term lowered monthly bills, but from the satisfaction of our significant gift back to the planet. Our improved air quality and environmentally friendly products serve to safeguard the health of all who enter our facility.

Supporting the community is an extension of being an environmentalist. Hiring and buying locally is another contribution to the area. We were honored when asked to speak on behalf of Petaluma's "Build it Green Project" and encourage others to adopt green practices. We feel it's our privilege to donate time and services to local shelters, such as the Petaluma Humane Society and other community organizations.

We have a passion for pets and the planet we all share. That's why we wanted to create a place where the two would compliment each other in *purrrfect* harmony.

Fit 'n' Furry owners Grant and Marci Garl, Petaluma residents for more than 30 years, have been noted for their remarkable strides in creating their project and have been asked to speak numerous times on behalf of the City of Petaluma regarding green building topics. For more information, please visit www.fitnfurry.com or call (707)769-PETS.

