

# ANIMAL CARE CENTER LOBO



## HISTORY OF ACC LOBO



The Animal Care Centre Lobo is a truly unique kennel situated in the heart of Middlesex County in South Western Ontario. The facility, owned and operated by Martin and Gertie Dieleman, is not only a boarding facility and grooming shop, but it also serves as a shelter involved in animal control and licensing in its area. This combination creates a distinctive environment in which the welfare of pets – both those with and without permanent homes – is truly a priority.

Growing up on farms in The Netherlands and Canada, Gertie had the opportunity to spend plenty of time around a variety of animals, and they had a big impact on her.

“Animals have always fascinated me,” says Gertie, “especially the dogs and cats.” Even after graduating from high school with a degree in business, working as a receptionist, marrying, and having three children; the fascination did not die. When her children were born, Gertie became a stay-at-home mom, allowing her to spend time with her kids and their menagerie of animals.

“We purchased a 30-acre farm in 1970,” Gertie explains. “In the beginning years, we had various animals: goats, rabbits, beef cattle, pigs, and always a dairy cow for milk. The children enjoyed owning two Shetland ponies for a few years.” In 1978, Gertie acquired a contract to collect dog tax for her township. This was the turning point that led her into the pet care industry.

“It was a very small, humble beginning and opened the door to what I can now say is my life’s work,” Gertie says. “My passion for taking care of pets became a reality.”

### A Business Evolves

A year after Gertie began her new job collecting dog tax, she was approached by her township about becoming involved in animal control by taking in trays. She agreed and rented a nearby kennel while she began constructing her own facilities in their old barn. The self-contained, insulated room contained only five kennels. When completed, it passed overnment inspection and became the humblebeginning of taking in the lost, abandoned dogs for the township.

Soon, however, Gertie was approached by neighboring townships that were also seeking assistance in animal control and licensing. After receiving a large



contract from a nearby urban center in the late 1980s, Gertie decided to expand her shelter with much-needed additional kennel space. The new building was erected in 1992, and the animal care center truly became a family affair.

This new facility was designed by the Dieleman's oldest daughter, Suzanne, who had a degree in architecture. Several nephews who owned a construction company were put to work, and Gertie's husband, Martin (whom she calls the "Steel Man"), played a large role in construction, putting his knowledge of welding, plumbing, electrical work, and even gardening into the project.

After the new facility was built, clients who had adopted strays from them began asking if they could board their pets for them while they were away. Wanting to utilize the kennel space rather than letting it sit empty, the Dielemans took on this new idea, and the shelter evolved to providing boarding services to pet owners. They even paid their daughter Mary Jo's tuition to a grooming school so that they could provide a grooming service as a part of the boarding package. Gertie says of Mary Jo, "She is a natural and is still helping out at the kennel, not only doing the occasional grooming job, but also taking more of a leadership role in the operation of the kennel."

The business continued to grow and thrive in the 1990s. In 1999, the Dielemans added a space specifically for cats to the original kennel building. Business continued to grow, and they soon found they were once again running out of space. So, in 2007, Gertie and Martin decided to expand again. Martin had retired from his job of almost 40 years as shop supervisor for a large structural steel and fabricating plant, and he took on the new project of overseeing the demolition of their barn and silo and the construction of a new kennel in its place. Today they are happy they don't have to turn clients away due to lack of space.

## The Facilities

Today, Animal Care Centre Lobo has two kennel buildings, each with about 2,500 square feet of space. The first building holds a total of 24 kennels with connected outdoor runs. As well there is a lobby, reception area, cat room, grooming room, kitchen, and storage area. The new building built in 2007 has 35 kennels, 18 of which have connected outdoor runs. Every effort was made in the construction of the buildings and kennels to ensure functionality and safety.



The dog kennel's inside walls are constructed of cement blocks up to six feet in height, with gates and tops made of stainless steel and floors with an epoxy coating to allow easy cleaning with a high-pressure sprayer. The runs are built of heavy-duty commercial grade chain-link fencing complete with tops and two-foot-high concrete partitions between them, and they are surrounded by an additional security fence. Outside fencing is buried 12 inches into the ground to prevent dogs from digging out.

Additionally, the Dielemans have constructed their buildings with Canada's varying temperatures in mind. Both buildings are well insulated to provide a cool environment in hot seasons and a warm environment in winter weather. Urethane insulation gives both buildings an R value between 40 and 50. They use hot water piping in the floors to heat the buildings, and they have found that provides reliable, efficient heat. Each room has separate ventilation and thermostats for added control and comfort and to prevent the spread of airborne disease.

The facility also includes 10 small corrals to divide compatible dogs during exercise times, as well as a large communal play area complete with two bone-shaped pools for the dogs to enjoy in hot weather. They hope to fence off an additional large area to use for agility and training or as another community play area. In addition to the outdoor enclosures, there is access to several miles of trails on the property for walking dogs.



## **Services and Care**

Gertie and Martin run their business using Kennelsoft Atlantis, a computer program that provides a great at-a-glance look at the animals checking in and out each day and has been extremely helpful for bookkeeping. They also use PetDetect collars for identification. Pets are required to have all vaccinations, including bordetella for the dogs and feline leukemia for cats.

Owners also must complete a boarding contract, which includes permission for community play and offers grooming and nail trim services. Gertie explains, “Getting them to fill out this form each time their dog comes in helps to generate a lot of grooming business.” They are also careful to explain their hours upon check-in, as Sundays and holidays have shortened times available for pickups and drop-offs.

Animal Care Centre Lobo gives owners the option of using the kennel’s provided pet food or bringing in their own food. They provide two-hour periods in the morning and evening for exercising the dogs, and the cat sunroom is equipped with perches and tunnels for them to enjoy. For organizational purposes, the facility uses a number system on the kennels and kennel cards with information about the pet inside. Special care is given to inspecting the cats daily to ensure health and catch any problems that might otherwise go unnoticed.



### **Technology /Cleaning**

The Dielemans have implemented various forms of technology to keep their pet care business running smoothly. In addition to the innovative floor heating system, they also employ video surveillance and intercom systems to monitor the animals, even from their home office. The intercom system allows them to play music throughout each building and allows for easy communication. They ultimately hope to have the technology to stream surveillance video over the internet so owners can check on their pets while they are boarded at the facility. Currently, high speed Internet service is not available in the area. Gertie and Martin use a variety of products to keep the facilities clean and odor free, but have found that the design of their kennel buildings – with sloped floors and sand covered with pea gravel surrounding the outside of the kennels – and a pressure sprayer are especially helpful in keeping things clean. They rely on bleach as a disinfectant and use Orange Peel for Pets and Swish Aromx products to fight odor. Gertie stresses that a clean, welcoming environment is essential for business success, and this includes their landscaping. “Having the property nice and neat, clean, and well-kept says a lot to the public,” she says. “It makes our kennel inviting. It is a joy to come and volunteer and observe the gardens and flowers in different stages of growth during the warm weather months.”



## **Community/Marketing**

Much of Animal Care Centre Lobo's success stems from its involvement in the community. As an adoption center in addition to a boarding kennel, the facility's work is often done on a volunteer basis. Volunteers come from Boy Scout and Girl Scout groups, as well as high school students who must complete community service hours in order to graduate and adults with court-ordered community service. The Dielemans have also developed a mutually beneficial relationship with members of the community with disabilities and their volunteers who give time to socializing with the animals. This helps prepare strays for adoption and can also be therapeutic for the volunteers.

The business also serves the community by accepting pets from women who are forced to enter shelters due to domestic abuse. "This is done at no cost to them for up to 30 days," Gertie explains. "Once a safe home is found for these women, the pets are reunited with their owners." Sometimes the women are unable to take the pets back after 30 days, and the pets are put into foster care or found new homes.

Gertie and Martin have found their website, [www.acclobo.com](http://www.acclobo.com), to be a great marketing tool. They also distribute business-card-sized magnets to customers to ensure their phone number is readily available on people's refrigerators and have their grandchildren distribute flyers and coupons around town. Another creative form of marketing they have discovered is the donation of gift certificates to community fundraisers. This allows them to support their community while generating new clients.



## **Staff**

Animal Care Centre Lobo is primarily a family endeavor, and this support is essential in Gertie's eyes. "We are a small family-operated business and make decisions together," she says. "My husband and daughter are taking a keen interest and are valuable assets in decision making. We support and help each other to ensure the business runs smoothly."

The kennel is run with two full-time employees and six part-time employees. They often hire co-op students from the local high school, which they have found to be a valuable opportunity for all involved.

Any time Gertie is in need of a new groomer, she has found great success in posting a "help wanted" ad on the bulletin board at a nearby grooming school. Other employees are hired similarly, through signs posted in their lobby or by word of mouth.

Employees are hired on a three-month trial basis, as it is clear early on if they will be responsible assets to the team. Employees who are doing well and show interest are given opportunities to participate in workshops related to the business at no expense to them." Gertie is happy to provide them with any opportunity to increase their skills and help the kennel run smoothly.



## **Adoption/Licensing**

In addition to being a boarding facility, Animal Care Centre Lobo is also a private contractor for animal control services. The adoption and licensing portion of Animal Care Centre Lobo creates added responsibility, but also provides numerous rewards.

Gertie knows the extra challenges that the animal control portion adds to their lives, but is proud when they are able to make a difference in a challenging situation. She tells of a withdrawn, pregnant “puppy mill” Shit Tzu they recently picked up. After the owner surrendered the dog to them, they placed it in a foster home. “Now,” says Gertie, “we hope and pray that this little dog will come around and live out the rest of its life with the care it deserves.”



When stray dogs are picked up, they make every attempt to reunite them with their owners. If the owners aren't found after a three-to-five day period, the dogs are put up for adoption. Occasionally, they accept overflow from other shelters, and they even provided space for dogs rescued from the Hurricane Katrina disaster. They do not euthanize adoptable pets, but strive to shelter all healthy and sociable animals in a loving, clean environment until a suitable home is found.



Finding new homes for abandoned animals is one of the most rewarding parts of Gertie's job. She says, “It is a joy to see the stray dogs and felines go into excellent homes where they are finally appreciated and well cared for.” In the last 15 years, the facility's staff has found homes for 2,826 stray dogs and puppies as well as 3,429 cats. The facility's website has a special section, called “Happy Tails,” that spotlight several adoption success stories.

Animal Control contracts pay Animal Care Centre Lobo only for basic services, but the income from the boarding and grooming business allows the facility to give unmatched care to the strays that enter. Occasionally, the combination of a shelter with a boarding facility makes people hesitant, but Gertie invites them to take a tour so that they can see the environment their pets would stay in.



Gertie recognizes the stress that accompanies the pet care business, but she is thankful to be living out her passion. “The good far outweighs the bad!” she says. “It is not for everyone, but to those whose passions are seeing animals healthy, happy, and flourish under their care, nothing can surpass the tremendous satisfaction in doing a job that needs doing and doing it well.”

She’s also found the key to succeeding in this business. “You have to love animals and people in order to have them trust you in the care of their precious pets,” Gertie says. “To them their pets are ‘family.’ It is a huge responsibility we do not take lightly.”

