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Pretty

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they're so happy to go. It's a step beyond just going for a walk. It's a different activity for them. A lot of them love to look out of the window or get in and out of the car between stops, and it's a lot of fun."

McQuire, who charges between \$30 and \$40 for the caravan service, says that, although her van is equipped with crates — in her opinion, the safest way to travel — many of her clients prefer their dogs to ride loose in the back seat, untethered, and she has chauffeured up to four dogs at a time this way.

"I don't usually take that many at one time, though," she says. "I mean, they get along just fine, but it's a bark fest."

"I remember one time I had four in the car at once, and every time I'd drive past this dog's grandparents' house, he'd bark. He'd spent a lot of time at that house, and I swear, he knew it was where his grandparents lived, so he would bark. Then the other one would start to bark. It was just constant barking, but they were having a good time, so that's all I really care about."

Schedule permitting, she says, she brings many of her caravan passengers back to her home to visit with her own dogs.

"It's sort of like a play date for them," she says. "My dogs are always excited to see other dogs, so it's good for them as well as for the caravan dog. My clients have said that their dogs are exhausted when they get home from work, and they just sort of open one eye and roll over."

McQuire says the pet caravan isn't for every dog, since many dogs tend to associate car rides with having to go to the vet. She says it also may not be for every client, since the special service is rather costly.

"It's certainly not something



Ready to hit the highway are (from left) Patsy, Obi, Gracie and Mighty.

(STAFF PHOTO: DARYL STONE)

that a pet owner would want to do every day," she says. "They could probably rent a limo all day for that cost. But it does break up the week for the dog, and I think that makes the owners feel good because they feel like their pets are having little adventures on the road."

In order to accommodate her growing business, McQuire has hired two full-time employees, as well as a part-time retired couple in Red Bank. She is planning to hire one more employee but says she doesn't want her company to grow too big, since she and her co-workers already walk between 25 and 45 dogs a day.

"My philosophy on this whole service is that it should be personalized," she says. "I don't want to sound like I'm the General Motors of pet sitting."

"I generally service from Monmouth Beach up to Hazlet, and Union Beach out to Colts Neck. Then, I have a couple of accounts in Red Bank, and my retired couple services those dogs. I really don't want to become a big business, because I don't want to lose that personal touch."

Although her average visit lasts about 20 minutes, McQuire says that she often ends up spending more time with her charges in the evenings or when her schedule permits.

For pets that need round-the-clock care, she charges \$60 for an overnight visit, which includes, if requested, the pet caravan service.

She says most of the pets she

cares for are happy to see her walk through the door of their homes, but she admits to having been bitten once or twice.

"About a year into doing this, I went to meet this woman's pets, and she had a small-breed dog that seemed very threatened by me," she says. "I thought I had been stung by a bee, and I looked down, and I saw little tooth marks."

"I went out and got a tetanus shot, and that was the end of it."

An advocate for pet rescue and adoption, McQuire says her greatest satisfaction has been in winning the trust and love of adopted dogs that had previously been victims of abuse.

"Sometimes, it just takes a bit more perseverance and patience," she says. "When I take care of other people's dogs, it's not my responsibility to turn them into the perfect dog, nor am I trained to do that. It is my responsibility to get them comfortable enough to know that I'm their buddy and that I'm going to be there for a while every day, and, let me tell you, it's a wonderful feeling when you can win their trust. It's great to know that they're happy to see you when, maybe a month before, they were leery of you. It's the best feeling in the world to feel like you've reached them, and they know you're their friend. I think that's what this business is all about."

For more information on Auntie Linda's Pet Sitting Services, call (732) 706-5666.