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Condos add pet-friendly amenities

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When Georgia Tech chemistry professor Steven Giradot decided to find a new home closer to his job, he had to account for something besides his own preferences in choosing the next place to live.

He had to think about Junior and Sidney. Especially Sidney, who is an energetic Jack Russell terrier.

Giradot looked at some single family houses in the Home Park neighborhood, but all were too expensive or in need of repair.

Condos in Midtown, he said, just didn't work for Sidney or Boston Terrier Junior.

"There really wasn't any area you could go and walk the dogs without being in the middle of the city," said Giradot, who ended up buying a condo at the Art Foundry in Atlantic Station, which includes a large, tended dog park.

"It was definitely nice to see that they had thought about that," he said.

A survey of owners at The Manhattan, a highrise condo near Perimeter Mall, recently identified 33 pet owners in the 227-unit development.

Condo developers are getting the message.

The latest, hottest selling item in condominium and loft projects is pet respite parks and other pet-friendly spaces.

Scott Leventhal, president and CEO of Tivoli Properties, is prominently promoting the pet-friendly aspects of his new luxury development in Buckhead, Mezzo. In addition to an indoor pet respite area, Mezzo will include a space equipped for grooming and bathing.

Leventhal said he became aware of the need during sales of his Midtown development Aqua at the intersection of 10th and West Peachtree streets.

"At least a half dozen very serious customers, who were ready for an urban lifestyle, were concerned that the nearest place for their dogs was Piedmont Park, which is four or five blocks away," Leventhal said. "That was just a little too far."

Condo dwellers love their pets

Especially because the condo market depends so heavily on downsizing Baby Boomers, pet amenities are an important draw and a natural evolution for Atlanta condo developers, said Frank Reese, a developer with the Novare Group who is guiding the construction of Gallery in Buckhead.

A lot of empty-nesters are moving from single family homes, where their pets have been a key member in their family life, Reese explained. While they're ready to park the lawn mower and live in a more manageable space, they remain devoted to their furry friends.

"The one thing they don't want to give up when they move is their pet," Reese said.

With that in mind, Gallery was designed with a roomy, well-kept greenspace at the north end of the development where dogs and owners can stroll. Reese also promotes Gallery's location at the edge of the leafy, walkable Garden Hills neighborhood.

An estimate of pet ownership in metro Atlanta derived from an American Veterinary Medical Association formula reveals that more than 1 million dogs and almost 1.2 million cats populated the area in 2002.

Nationally, almost two-thirds of U.S. households contain at least one pet, according to the American Pet Owners Survey. Americans will spend an estimated \$41 billion on pet care this year, and pet care is widely considered a lucrative growth sector of the economy.

The details matter

Jason Frost, vice president for development at Cousins Properties, developer of Terminus at the intersection of Peachtree Street and Piedmont Avenue, said he was a little surprised at the depth of buyer response to inclusion of a 1,500-square-foot pet respite on the building's roof.

"It comes up a lot more than we would have anticipated," Frost said.

And with great attention to detail.

Prospective homeowners at Terminus are already familiar with the pea gravel medium and drainage specifications the area needs, Frost said. And they want to know how many times a day the attendant will clean and groom the site.

That's because dog walks and other pet amenities are already a common feature in densely populated cities such as Miami, Chicago or New York, said David Laube, vice president of the Morsberger Group.

Private respites help owners cope with inclement weather and odd hours as well as the concrete character of the urban core.

"City of Atlanta parks close at sundown and there are safety concerns," Laube said.

Laube is guiding the development of The Exchange, a Mitchell Street loft project in downtown's Railroad District. And he is planning to include a specially designed dog park with washable synthetic "canine grass" and fake fire hydrants in its half-acre amenity deck. The area will also include a fresh-water station.

Laube said market research shows that the dog walk is likely to be one of the project's most trafficked amenities.

On average, about five percent of a development's residents will consistently use a fitness center, which is considered standard in contemporary condo and loft developments, Laube said. Fewer than that will be regulars at the community center.

But 15 percent to 20 percent of a condo's homeowners are likely to be pet owners, according to Laube.

"A pet amenity is something that your pet owners are going to use twice a day, every day," he said.

According to the 2007-2008 National Pet Owners Survey, 63% of U.S. households own a pet, which equates to 71.1 millions homes

In 1988, the first year the survey was conducted, 56% of U.S. households owned a pet as compared to 63% in 2006

• Total Number of Pets Owned in the U.S. (millions)

Bird: 16

Cat: 88.3

Dog: 74.8

Equine: 13.8

Freshwater Fish: 142.0

Saltwater Fish: 9.6

Reptile: 13.4

Small Animal: 24.3

• Atlanta snapshot

According to a formula provided by the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Atlanta MSA had 1,033,424 dogs and 1,175,965 cats in 2002.

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