

## Welcome to Dogtown USA

**In DOG FANCY's search for the best cities in which to be a dog, we discovered innovative shelter programs, generous amenities, thoughtful policies, and many wonderful dog lovers.**

*Jane Musgrave*

So, we consulted the experts — humane societies, animal control agencies, veterinarians, groomers, breeders, trainers, pet sitters, and others. We dug for facts, figures, statistics, and numbers — lots of numbers. The problem, the experts explained, is one that confounds everybody, including the IRS: numbers lie. For instance, if you try to determine a city's ranking on the dog-o-meter by rating how many dog trainers practice there, you'll automatically favor urban areas. As one dog trainer told us, "Our members naturally are where the dogs are and most dogs, like most people, are in urban areas."

Undeterred, we romped on. OK, so we'll figure it out on a per capita basis — another bone-headed idea, we quickly learned. As the heads of myriad organizations told us, there's no way to do it. Take pet sitters. They don't have to join a professional association. So crunching the membership lists of Pet Sitters International and the National Association of Pet Sitters would give us only the number of pet sitters in a certain city that elected to join a group — not every sitter in the business.

The most succinct comment about the folly of our quest came from a dog park enthusiast. "I don't know of any dog parks in Montana," she said. Then, as we were about to cross the entire state off our list, she continued, "But they don't need them. The entire state of Montana is a dog park." A shelter official in Montana confirmed that having a dog park in Montana would indeed be redundant.

We went back to the proverbial drawing board. How would Fido pick the best city to call home? How about a city with programs that make life worth living, or, even better, that make life possible? How about places with no-kill shelters that practically will dogs into good homes?

That seemed like a good place to start. We asked the same experts which cities had instituted innovative programs to curb the euthanization of healthy dogs. Quickly, names surfaced—the most obvious being San Francisco, whose Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has a \$13 million-a-year budget and a shelter they describe as The Ritz.

But this isn't an election. We did not look for cities with rich shelters. In fact, a call to the Humane Society in Bozeman, Mont.—the city without dogparks—proved you don't need millions of dollars to create a dog-friendly town. With a \$400,000 budget, the humane society's programs have turned Bozeman into a place any dog would be happy to call home.

So, here's our list of five great cities and three honorable mentions. Though not scientific or all-inclusive, it's a good start.