

# Boarding All “Paws-engers”



*Animal-relief stations  
to become standard  
at airports*

BY DAVID RAMIREZ



**K**aren Dunmore travels with her faithful, 3½-year-old West Highland Terrier, Katie. On a pampered scale of 1 to 10, Dunmore says Katie is a solid 12.

“When Katie walks through an airport, she gets this different attitude about her,” Dunmore says of her emotional-support animal. “She acts like she’s walking on a red carpet.”

During a recent trip with a connecting layover at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, Katie made a beeline to one of the animal-relief areas inside Terminal 4.

Crisis averted.

“The animal-relief areas in Phoenix are exceptional,” Dunmore says. “The restrooms for pets in Phoenix are the best, by far.”

The airport personnel strive for this quality and want to hear from their passengers traveling with pets.

Phoenix Sky Harbor, owned by the city, has nine animal-relief areas for the traveling public—four inside and five outside. They are maintained by the airport’s Facilities & Services Division.

At least one animal-relief area is inside and outside each of the three terminals. Terminal 4, which handles 80 percent of the airport’s passenger traffic, has two indoor animal-relief areas located post-security.

Acting Assistant Aviation Director Bobbie Reid says the airport has invested much time and research in planning and installing the relief areas ever since America’s Friendliest Airport built its first one in 2009.

“We planned meticulously every step of the way with these areas,” says Reid. “People traveling with their animals have high expectations—and justifiably so. Their animals are literally part of their family.”



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**—JENNIFER MAPLES, AVIATION**

## PET TRAVEL AND FEDERAL LAW

Pets and emotional-support animals in airports are a common sight.

Susan Smith, president of petTravel.com, says the areas are a tremendous benefit. "Millions of pet owners travel with their pets because they realize how much their pets can enrich a vacation, provide needed companionship, and allow their



owners to be sure they will be cared for as lovingly as they are at home," she said. "We are a world on the move and with the plethora of pet-friendly hotels and restaurants available, pets do not need to be left behind anymore."

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Transportation notified airports of a new rule requiring them to install post-security, checkpoint relief areas for service animals that accompany passengers with disabilities.

Phoenix Sky Harbor management had the foresight to recognize the pending directive and took pro-active measures to comply with the federal mandate, eventually enforced in August 2015.

For the record, the new mandate was actually an update to 49 CFR Part 27, which centers on nondiscrimination because of a disability.

## INDOOR RELIEF AREAS

Airport personnel contemplated indoor design looks and locations immediately after the announcement, says Title VI/ADA Program Manager Mary Beth Thompson.

Thompson says only a handful of airports had indoor facilities at the time, but staff reviewed information and photos



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**WHEN BUILDING OUTDOOR RELIEF AREAS, POLL THOSE WITH SERVICE ANIMALS ON WHAT AND WHAT NOT TO INCLUDE.**



on airport sites in Detroit, San Diego, Pittsburgh, and Washington Dulles. Staff members culled ideas from those airports to customize the animal-relief areas at Sky Harbor.

“Space is in high demand at an airport,” Thompson says. “If space isn’t used by an airline or concessionaire, it’s already taken by other airport divisions. So we had to ‘negotiate’ with other divisions to carve out areas.”

Her team also had to consider walking distance for passengers, as well as to look at existing infrastructure, such as plumbing and the cost impact.

The assignment was challenging. Areas inside concourses were specifically designed to serve customers and other commercial airports that, like Sky Harbor, operate 24/7.

Construction work, usually done at night, was halted altogether during busy holiday seasons in order to minimize the impact on travelers.

The first indoor relief areas opened last fall, and the fourth was unveiled in February.

As for other airports attempting to address animal-relief areas, Thompson says:

- Consult with a local agency that trains service animals. The input is invaluable.
- Keep the space clean—this is huge for both animal owners and other travelers.
- Ensure that the “smell factor” doesn’t impact the traveling public.

“People are very grateful to have locations that are convenient to them,” says Thompson. “Think about it—a dog has just traveled for four or more hours, and when they have to go, an outdoor bathroom is just too much of a walk for them, so we have them covered.”

## OUTDOOR RELIEF AREAS

Phoenix Sky Harbor has five outdoor animal-relief areas, one beside each of the three terminals.

Another is located at the airport’s largest economy-parking facility, and the Phoenix Sky Train 44th Street Station has a fenced-in animal-relief area.

Service animals and pets that travel with their companions, along with dogs that are part of the Police K-9 unit and other federal agencies, use the areas. In addition, many airport visitors bring pets with them when dropping off or picking up passengers, and find the pet-relief areas useful.

A relief area is also in the cargo section.

Each park has its own distinguishing name: The Pet Patch, Paw Pad, Bone Yard, Park & Bark, and Park ‘n Play.

Aviation Superintendent Jennifer Maples says the exterior facilities were named in order to differentiate them for the traveling public.

She says some of the names were the brainchild of staff directly involved in the construction of the animal-relief areas, while the Sky Train location had a naming contest among aviation staff.

“Once the pet parks opened, cleanliness was at the forefront of our maintenance checklist,” Maples says. “These areas are cleaned, raked, and restocked each and every day, and not just once. There are no exceptions.”

Each outdoor animal-relief area is enclosed with fencing and equipped with water bowls, fire hydrants, wood-chip mix as ground cover, dog waste dispensers, and sitting benches.

Maples echoes Thompson’s comments about space when the team was looking for appropriate locations for the dog-relief areas.

“Space is a very limited and highly sought commodity at an airport, so we had to be creative and selective in our search and installation,” she says.

Maples notes that the team intentionally avoided areas that would trigger comprehensive environmental assessments or substantially displace other airport users—either of which can be costly, time-consuming, and cumbersome for staff.

Key points for other airports to consider when building outdoor animal-relief areas:



- Poll those with service animals on what and what not to include.
- Make locations easy to find with sufficient signage and in directories and maps, even those posted online.

“People traveling are usually in a hurry, so they want to find what they’re looking for very quickly,” Maples says. “Do their homework for them and make your animal-relief areas easy to find.”

One recent traveler, who easily found an animal-relief area at Sky Harbor, was Kaylie Walker, a registered nurse who travels frequently with her Yorkie, Perri.

“This is fantastic,” she said at the Terminal 3 pet park. “The upkeep is great. I’ll definitely be back with my dog. I know she likes it here.”

Yes, every dog has its day at Phoenix Sky Harbor. **PRB**

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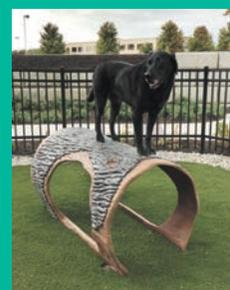
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