



Virginia Woof Dog Daycare Center, Portland, OR

## Unique Center Combines Job and Dog Training on Colorful nora<sup>®</sup> Floors

As dog daycare centers grow in popularity and number, the Virginia Woof Dog Daycare Center in Portland, OR, remains unique. Owned and operated by Outside In, a social service agency dedicated to serving low-income adults and homeless youth, the center is the first dog daycare center in the nation to be used as a job-training program.

According to its director, David Stone, Virginia Woof takes advantage of the natural connection between youth and animals to provide 10 weeks of hands-on training for young men and women between ages 18 and 24. "Our goal is to give them valuable work experience and teach them how to handle themselves in a real working world where they need to report on time, deal with authority, and learn a skill set. We offer them stability and the chance to live independently."

The center's West Burnside facility is located in an early twentieth century building with a history as a car dealership and a sign company. Renovated to suit the needs of the dogs it cares for, the 3,350-square-foot center is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and equipped to handle as many as 50 dogs during the day and kennel 14 dogs overnight.

To help with the conversion from car showroom to dog playroom, Outside In enlisted the expertise of Portland's Clark/Kjos Architects and designer Michelle Mueller. According to Mueller, the work became more than just a quick, low-fee exercise. "It was a huge opportunity for me. I got involved in everything – planning, permitting, picking finishes, painting, recruiting volunteers and seeking vendor donations. I didn't mind the long hours, because I really believe in the Outside In organization and what they're doing at Virginia Woof."

From the outset of the project, Virginia Woof staff were concerned about the floor that would cover the dog areas of the center. "Foot fatigue is a real consideration for the dogs, so the staff wanted to move away from the existing concrete and terrazzo floors and go with a more comfortable floor covering," Mueller explained. "They also wanted something that would be easy to clean, nonporous, antibacterial and durable enough to stand up to the dogs' claws – criteria I felt certain nora<sup>®</sup> products could meet."



Mueller's work with Clark/Kjos, which specializes in healthcare facilities, provided her with a wealth of experience with products from nora systems, Inc. "I've worked with nora products a number of times, and I've always had good results," she said. "They offer a wide range of colors, which makes the products easy to work with from a design standpoint. Their norament® products have a fairly high content of recycled material, and they hold up well."

Stone was pleased with the recommendation to use nora products. "Everything I heard indicated the floor would meet our criteria," he said. As a result, norament product covers the dog play and exercise areas, introducing two shades of gray, terracotta red and chocolate brown color blocks in a scattered geometric design.

"I laid out a big pattern on the floor, because I thought it would work better with the space, Mueller explained, "Also, Jason DeBenedetto and the people at Floor Solutions, in Portland, were giving us a price break on labor, and I didn't want to create a complicated pattern that would be difficult to lay down. It was an attempt to be creative, a little bit playful and budget conscious all at the same time, and I think it worked."

In the end, the norament product was the perfect choice for this unique facility. According to Stone, it's a thick floor covering with a "cushiony" feel that is good for the dogs as they rest and play on it daily. "In our other location we have a poured rubber floor, which is a thin layer of rubber over cement," said Stone. "The difference between the poured floor and the nora rubber floor is like night and day because of the cushion the nora floor provides for the dogs' joints. I've also noticed that the poured floor can wear down the pads on some of the dogs' paws. The nora floor never seems to bother any paws, and it provides an element of slip resistance that makes it easy and safe for the dogs to run and play."

The floor is also holding up to the claws that go with those paws. "The dogs are pretty hard on the floor as they play and roughhouse," said Stone, "But the norament product seems to be very, very durable and is showing no signs of degradation."

Just as important to Stone is the ease with which he's able to care for the floor. "We needed something that would be easy to clean and would not hold the smells associated with a dog daycare. This product definitely fits the bill. It's easy to clean, the floor doesn't smell, and it looks nice every time we clean it. In fact, I'd say it's just as beautiful today as the day we installed it."

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DeBenedetto agreed. "To be frank with you," he said, "going into the Virginia Woof project I didn't think there was any product that I felt would be an absolute bullet-proof floor for them. I thought we were looking at a range of options just trying to find the least bad option. But, today I can honestly tell you that the nora floor covering is performing extremely well and seems to be the perfect solution for this particular application. It looks fantastic, as good as the day we put it in, and it's performing for them just the way they wanted it to perform. It's a great story!"

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Michelle Mueller  
 Designer  
 Clark/Kjos Architects

