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DECEMBER 2025

Home Is Where the Pets Are

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TURNED THEIR LIFELONG LOVE
OF ANIMALS INTO A FULL-TIME
PET-SITTING ADVENTURE.

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Home Is Where the Pets Are

RANCHO MIRAGE COUPLE JEFF AND WAYNE BAHR TURNED THEIR LIFELONG LOVE OF ANIMALS INTO A FULL-TIME ADVENTURE, BRINGING COMFORT TO PETS—AND THEIR PEOPLE—ACROSS THE GOLDEN STATE.

**ARTICLE BY ADRIENNE VAN DER VALK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KAREN PORTNER**

When Jeff and Wayne Bahr's beloved cats passed away a few years ago, they thought they were done with pet care. Instead, their loss opened the door to a new adventure—and a new calling.

Friends began asking them to watch their animals "just for the weekend," and before long, the requests turned into a business, a passion and a packed travel schedule. Today, the Rancho Mirage couple is known across California as The Pet Daddies, trusted sitters with hearts as big as their client list.

Winding Career Paths

Before Rancho Mirage stole their hearts, Jeff and Wayne lived full, busy lives up north. Jeff grew up surrounded by every creature imaginable—ducks, bantams, pigeons and dogs—and spent 33 years in the corporate world with

Safeway, followed by a decade at UC Santa Cruz.

Wayne, born in Delaware and raised near Philadelphia, spent most of his career with the San Francisco Ballet and Opera and Bechtel Engineering.

"Back in the electric-typewriter days, I could type a hundred words a minute," he laughs. "But when computers took over, it was time for a change." A heart-to-heart with his sister reminded him how, as a kid, he used to give the neighborhood dogs haircuts with a toy clipper.

So Wayne took a leap of faith. He enrolled in grooming school at the SPCA in San Francisco, earned his certificate and opened a dog-grooming business. His success, he says, was bolstered by his almost supernatural bond with canines of all shapes and sizes and "good doggy karma."

Enter the Pet Daddies

By the time the couple met over a decade ago, Wayne was ready to branch out from grooming

and Jeff was easing into retirement. When they finally sold their home in Santa Cruz and moved to Rancho Mirage in 2021, they expected life to slow down.

Then came a familiar refrain from friends: "Would you mind watching our dogs while we travel?"

One weekend turned into two, then into a calendar booked solid. "Next year we already have 165 days scheduled," says Wayne. "It just snowballed."

Today, The Pet Daddies travel from the Bay Area to Santa Barbara to Palm Springs and beyond, caring for beloved pets whose owners can relax knowing their furry family members—and their homes—are in meticulous hands. The Bahrs are insured, bonded and proudly old-school in their reliability. "We don't smoke, we don't drink, we don't do drugs," Jeff says. "We just love animals, and people trust that."

The Dog Whisperer

Ask any of their clients and they'll tell you Wayne has a gift. "Dogs that snap at everyone else will be asleep in his lap within minutes," Jeff says. "I can try everything: treats, walks, extra belly rubs; they always end up choosing him."

Wayne is modest about his gifts. "Maybe it's my voice, or maybe I just get them," he says. "I talk to animals the way some people talk to babies."

Take Frankie, the little chihuahua whose owner warned them she was "impossible." When the family returned, they found Frankie blissfully curled on Wayne's knee. "They asked if I'd drugged their dog," Wayne laughs. "Nope! Just love and patience."

Above and Beyond, for People and Pets

Part of The Pet Daddies' popularity comes from professionalism that feels personal. Each new booking begins with a meet-and-greet, where owners, pets and sitters alike size each other up. "It's important that everyone feels comfortable," Jeff explains. "We've even turned down a job or two when it wasn't the right fit."

Once they accept a client, they go all in: daily updates, spotless houses and sometimes even folded laundry. "One reviewer wrote that her home looked better when she got back than when she left," Wayne says. "That's the kind of feedback that keeps us going."

Falling for the Desert

Wayne and Jeff agree that Rancho Mirage was love at first sight. "There's something magical about the mountains," Jeff says. "Every morning we wake up and just look out at them in awe."

The couple had vacationed in Palm Springs before, but it was a local realtor who introduced them to Rancho Mirage. "We were looking for sunshine and peace after years of fog in the Bay Area," Wayne says. "Here it's warm, clean and so beautiful. It's like living in a postcard."

They've embraced their new community wholeheartedly, spending free afternoons exploring thrift and antique stores ("the best in the valley!") and enjoying musical theater at the McCallum and other local venues. "It's the kind of place that reminds you of growing up in the '50s," Wayne adds. "Wholesome, tidy and full of kind people."

Looking Ahead

Between their California adventures and their Rancho Mirage home base, The Pet Daddies' calendar stays packed—but they still find time to dream. "One of these days we're taking that cruise to Italy," Jeff says. "But until then, there are plenty of paws to pamper right here."

For Jeff and Wayne, compassion and humor come through in everything they do, including caring for pets. For them, it's not just work; it's purpose.

"Everybody has a calling," Wayne says. "Some people sing, some act and some build houses. I think mine is simply to love animals. Luckily, they love me right back."

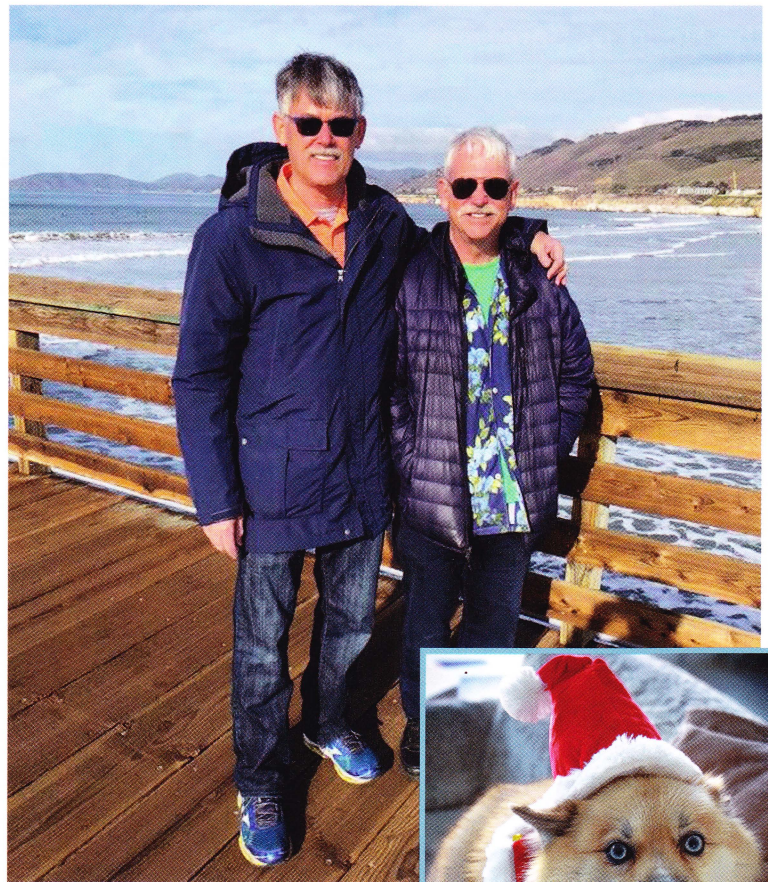
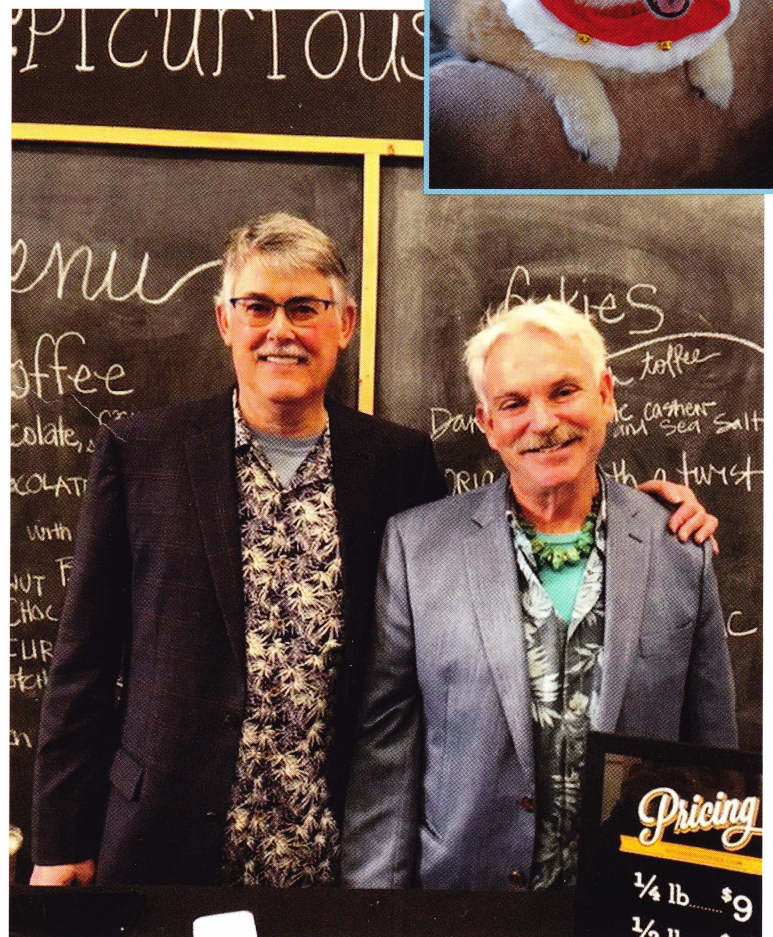
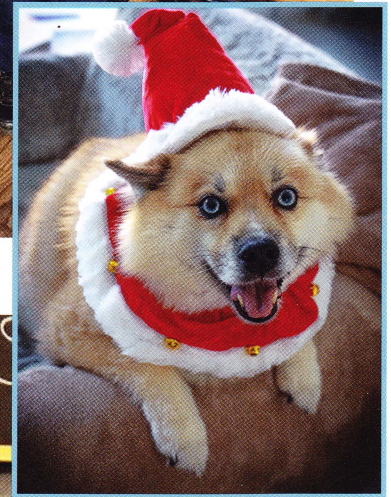


Photo courtesy of Wayne and Jeff Bahr



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