

Luick with some of the canines in his care. — Pictures by Farhan Najib

# Home away from home

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THE death of a beloved pet is a sorrowful event for any family, but for Norasmah Bahaudin and Mohd Azizi Ahmad, the tragic loss of their cat inspired them to help other pet owners.

Norasmah and her husband Azizi run the Cathut Feline Hotel in the Ampang Baru commerce centre in Ipoh, a boarding house for cats who need a temporary place to stay while their owners are away.

They were spurred to do so after their own cat, Lola, died while under the care of a sub-par caretaker last June.

"We had gone outstation and when we returned, she was critically ill. Even after seeking treatment, it was too late to save her," Norasmah said.

"Her sibling, Dino, also fell ill shortly afterwards, but the veterinarian managed to save him. He was minutes away from dying.

"After going through that, we decided to set up this business to give other pet owners the chance to leave their pets in a clean and safe boarding home," she said.

Today, Cathut houses up to 35 felines on weekends and public holidays. It offers several categories of lodging, including "condos", "apartments" and "penthouses", as well as a play area.

The lodging built by Azizi provides ample space for the cats to meander around, a departure from the traditional wire cage concept.

Azizi said business had been increasing over the past few months, as more and more pet owners wanted safe and comfortable conditions for their furry friends.

The duo put a premium on maintaining high standards of comfort and cleanliness, as they believe Lola died from an illness contracted in an unhygienic boarding house.

"Owners increasingly feel like their pets are their children. They are willing to pay to ensure the animals receive the best

care possible," he said.

"I don't even have time to add more objects to the play area. More and more customers keep flooding in."

Felines are not the only ones to enjoy this temporary mode of accommodation, as boarding centres for dogs and other animals have also increased in Ipoh in recent years.

Some, such as Lovely Pet Centre near Bercham, offer grooming alongside boarding services.

Lovely Pet Centre owner Luick Seng Kern said the establishment, which could accommodate up to 48 dogs, began offering the service upon opening in 2005.

Over the next decade, however, he said several shops had begun sprouting up around town.

"The competition is increasing as there are around seven business offering similar services in this area," Luick said.

He said customers brought in an array of pets for boarding services, including dogs, cats, rabbits and even parrots.

"Most stay for two to three days during weekends and festive periods, but there are pets who stay for a week or more while their owners are overseas," Luick said.

"Nowadays, people think of their pets as partners and friends. They want their pets to be given the best care when they are unable to do so."

Mohd Azizi provides a clean and safe boarding home for pets.