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**By Caren Putterman**

## **PETCO Wants to Keep Family Pets at Home**

Petco is putting an animal-friendly spin on speed dating this summer.

The chain recently partnered with Sittercity, a web site that connects pet owners with potential caregivers. The goal of the program is to let pets stay at home rather than in kennels when their owners are away.

In-store support includes stanchion signs and aisle violators directing shoppers to the PETCO web site for more information. Select stores in New York and Chicago will host "SpeedSitting" events this summer in which pet owners can interview participating petsitters for five minutes and select the best match.

The alliance with Sittercity (which also provides child babysitting assistance) gives PETCO an inexpensive response to rival PetSmart, which currently operates PetsHotel kennel services in about 75 stores and plans to roll the program out to 435 locations. The service adds 29% to a store's revenue, according to PetSmart's 2006 annual report.

PETCO's list of in-house services includes grooming, education, insurance, "day camp" accommodations and photography.

San Diego-based PETCO operates approximately 850 stores in 49 states.