

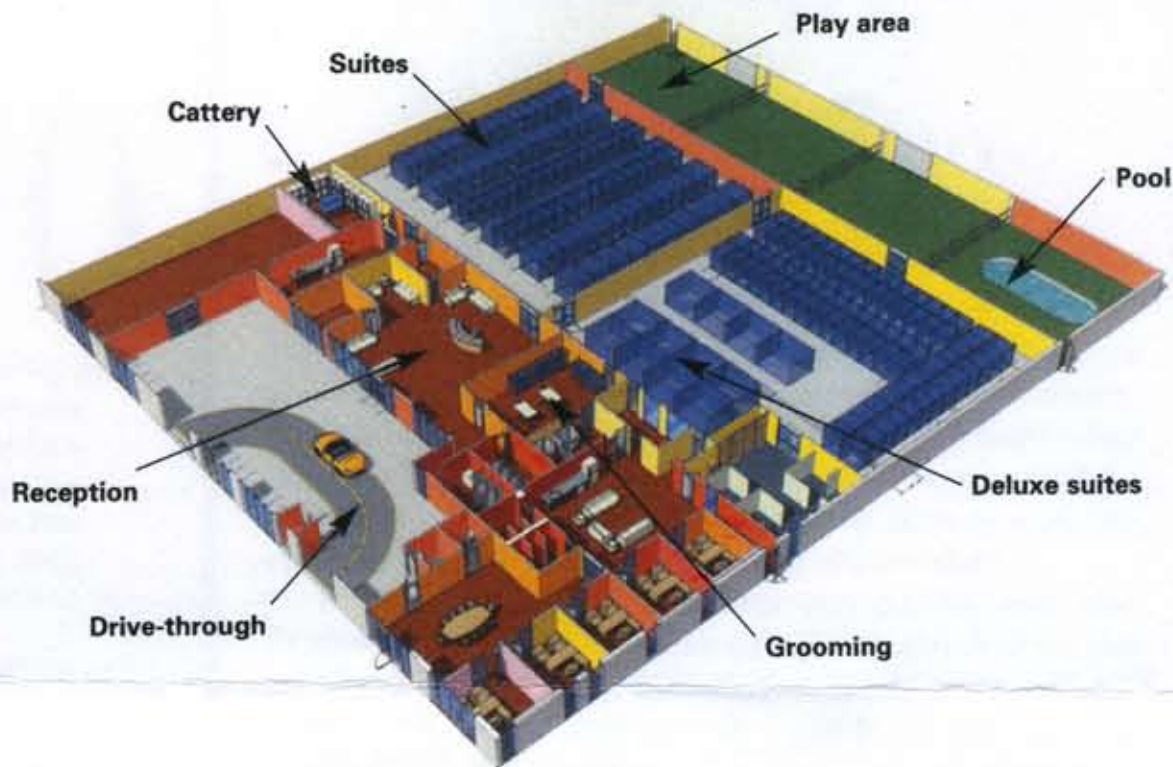
of the organization's 36 annual races, California hosts three, more than North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia or Texas, which each host two. And it wasn't that long ago that California was hosting only one race annually. The \$120 million California Speedway just brought NASCAR back to Southern California in 1997.

"Our sport is unique in that it's a traveling road show with an all-star event every week. Event dates are quite valuable — in generating revenue and building fan loyalty — and therefore coveted. Demand for NASCAR racing is significant, and just about every track operator, as well as local fans, would like more dates," says Andrew Giangola, director of business communications for NASCAR.

Despite that, or perhaps because of it, plans are being made to expand NASCAR's grip on the West. After a deal fell through late last year to build a track near Seattle, a new plan is taking shape that would bring NASCAR to that area. If developers can work out the financing for the \$300 million track and gain approval, cars could be burning rubber there by 2010.

Surely that gives folks in Northern California a glimmer of hope that the area could one day be home to the next NASCAR track. But, so far, no one around here is talking about such lofty dreams. The proposed Motorplex at Yuba County, which has been in the works for years, has been all but abandoned, says Randy Dzierzawski, who works directly for Champ Car owner Gerald Forsythe. That track would host Champ Car racing, in which turbocharged single-seaters are pitted against each other on an oval track.

There's a rumor that NASCAR will add a second race at Infineon. For now, that looks like our best hope for bringing more cars, more fans and more money to our area. But don't hold your breath about that happening any time soon. "Right now, it's premature to say if any schedule changes are expected for 2006," says Giangola.



Yes, it's a hotel — but you can't stay there

Taking a scenic weekend drive to a bed-and-breakfast is a pleasant conceit — but not for Fido. Narrow concrete dog runs surrounded by chain link fencing are all travelers' pets had to look forward to when fall foliage time rolled around. Now they have a bed-and-breakfast of their own to salivate over.

The concept was hatched a year ago by two friends who'd never run a kennel. Joel Leineke, one half of the partnership, says he and his pal Ritu Raj are "both very comfortable with what we don't know." Good thing — Leineke was previously a partner in Interstate Construction, which he sold in 2003.

Raj was a partner at Accenture in San Francisco when one of his best friends was struck by Guillan-Barre syndrome, an inflammatory disease that affects the nerves outside the brain and the spinal cord. For two years Raj's friend shared a room in St. Mary's with a senior partner at consultancy Booz Allen Hamilton who'd been badly wounded in a traffic accident. His roommate, the sole supplier to Wal-Mart of their private-label cat litter, opened Raj's eyes to the pet industry. "Back-of-the-napkin-things," as Leineke calls them, progressed, and by the end of August, "we'd convinced ourselves," says Leineke. By last September, they had begun to work full time on a business plan for a family of pet hotels.

The Wag hotel, intended to be the first in a chain, opens in West Sacramento this month. By next year, Leineke and Raj would like to open three hotels in the Bay Area, and then four a year every year thereafter, heading on to Los Angeles, Seattle and points further east. Leineke says he and Raj are looking at property in Oakland, Pleasanton, San Jose and Marin. If there's enough demand in West Sacramento, they'll begin looking in Placer County too.

Leineke decided to locate his flagship compound in West Sacramento not only because he has roots in the area (his aunt is Sacramento Magazine Dining Diva and caterer Joan

(continued on page 22)



Reader Poll

Have the London blasts — coming on the heels of the Madrid bombings and 9/11 — prompted you to put a continuity plan in place for your business?

Though no respondents said the U.K. blasts prompted continuity plans, many said that's only because their businesses have had perpetuation plans in place for years.

This month's question:
Do you think the November special election is a waste of money?

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DRAWING COURTESY OF WAG HOTELS

Leineke), but also because the city's real estate is "relatively affordable," its permitting and zoning regulations are business-friendly, and it's close to the airport. (And, according to Animal Wellness Magazine, Sacramento ranks seventh nationally for best quality of life for pets.)

Fortuitously, the pair has been able to bulk up their staff with other forward-thinking dog owners. They recruited an animal-behavior specialist just before she transitioned from the Sacramento SPCA to Best Friends, a pet resort in Connecticut that Leineke calls Wag's "only real competition." They also were able to bring Tammy Owens on board as vice president of customer service (she previously spent 14 years at San Francisco-based credit card provider Provident), and General Manager Pamela Mowry, whom Leineke says built the treasury at Foundation Health.

The 34,000-square-foot facility, which will house 220 dogs and 40 cats, features aboveground fiberglass rooms six inches off the floor with built-in drainage underneath. "Luxury suites" have sliding glass doors, beds with headboards, sofa/ottoman combos and sectionals. A swimming pool, play area and even a drive-up, drop-off window are also available to the non-exotic animals (no birds, rabbits or reptiles are allowed) the hotel aims to attract.

With a focus on cleanliness, care and noise-suppression (classical music will be played throughout the hotel to soothe its guests), Leineke believes he can turn what some might consider a cockamamie whim into a profitable limited-liability partnership. "It's a rigorous corporate discipline in a fun industry."

— Juno DeMelo