

The Mother of Invention

The introduction of T-Kennel's modular kennel system over 25 years ago solved an old problem, and it is a solution that continues to evolve.

By Jennifer Boncy

T-Kennel, a manufacturer of modular kennel systems, cat condos and other animal equipment, was born during a light-bulb-over-the-head moment,

as founder Jerry Thom watched an employee slosh through animal waste to clean a kennel facility, says David Wratford, corporate account manager for the company.

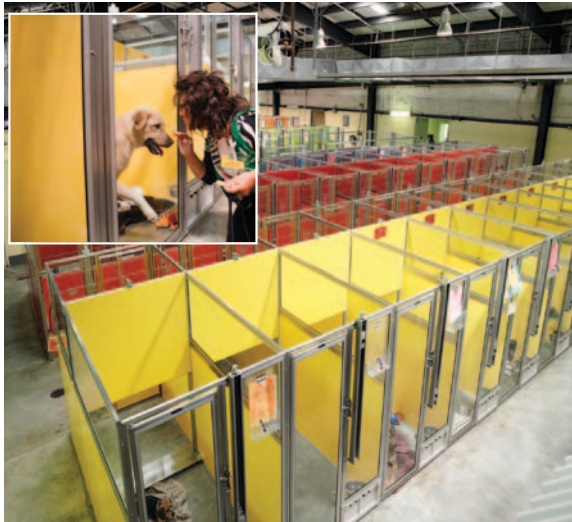
The worker hosed down each kennel run in turn, but as he made his way through the facility, waste and chemicals from each unit would inevitably end up seeping into the one adjacent.

"He thought, 'We are cross contaminating each and every kennel run, spreading germs everywhere throughout the facility,'" Wratford says.

The realization set Thom on a path to invent a solution to the troubling problem, and the result was a kennel system that offers users a contamination-resistant and flexible kennel-system design that meets the needs of both the animals it houses and the humans who work with it.

Located in Kansas City, Kan., T-Kennel has been making kennel runs for nearly three decades and has clients nationwide, and even abroad. The company outfits grooming salons, boarding facilities, doggie daycares, animal shelters, rescue centers and veterinary facilities. They range in size from one to two kennels up to five hundred.

While T-Kennel's products evolved over the years, as the company developed in pace with the technology available to it, the basic blueprint for the company's success has remained the same. Among the most important of T-Kennel's innovations, says Wratford, was the re-positioning of the drain. "One of the first things Thom did was reverse the slope," he explains. "He made the kennel flow from front to back [as



opposed to back to front as had been the custom at the time.]"

The design also debuted the concept of watertight kennel runs, eliminating cross contamination. The crowing hallmark of the system is T-Kennel's T-Cover—the inspiration for the company's name—which is a cover that goes over the drain that simultaneously prevents the animal from having access to the drain, while allowing feces, urine and chemicals to be washed away. "The T-Cover actually allows staff to wash the kennel from top to bottom without having to go in," Wratford says.

T-Kennel also expanded its designs beyond the industry standard of block walls and chain-link. It has introduced new materials with innovative design methods along the way, although "the idea and the overall functionality of the system," is the same as always, he says. About 15 years ago, T-Kennels began constructing kennels with acrylic/PVC—the same material used in airplanes—a fact that Wratford says speaks to its durability and germ-resistance. It's also non-porous and easy to clean.

The modular system has become increasingly flexible, as well. It is easily customized for a wide range of needs

the company endeavors to meet. However, the company is still able to retrofit block-wall facilities and offers options in stainless and galvanized steel and fiberglass.

"Pretty much, if an owner closes their eyes and visualizes how they would like to lay the system out, it is possible, given enough lead time and revenue, to do it," says Wratford, adding that among the company's chief goals is to do whatever it can to help facilities meet their individual needs.

Among T-Kennel's latest product designs is its Space Saver Kennels.

They are designed to retrofit existing facilities, as well as accommodate new construction.

The Space Saver Kennels are stackable to save precious floor space—as do other units in the company's product line—but the twist on the new design is that the Space Saver features full-width counter-balanced transfer doors.

"It gives the animal full visibility [when walking through], so the animal isn't timid," Wratford says. "It reduces stress on the animal, since it isn't worried about what's on the other side [of the door]."

"The system is also versatile, giving the end user the flexibility to customize the number of compartments they want or need based their current volume of animals," he says, adding that T-Kennel continues to look for new ways to meet the needs of its customers.

At any given time, the company may have several designs in the field being tested by willing and loyal customers, many of whom inspire innovation with their feedback and suggestions. Meanwhile, T-Kennel is also testing products internally, subjecting them to a good deal of scrutiny before unveiling them to potential customers. **PB**