

Pampered pets

From doggie daycare to canine couture, we're taking better care of our furballs than ever before



ABOVE/ Vhea Cannon gives Emmy a bath at Dirty Dawgs.

When five o'clock rolls around, a flood of parents arrive at Dee's Doggie Den to pick up their anxiously waiting dogs from daycare.

These pups have spent the day playing in a yard equipped with a brown plastic playhouse — slide included — and strewn with toys. Some of them also go through training classes such as Puppy Kindergarten.

Pet-oriented businesses such as Dee's have been sprouting up across Dallas for some time, feeding into a quickly growing trend to pamper pets. People are spending more and more money on everything from daycare to puppy couture to spa treatments for the furriest members of their families.

Laura Baldillez owns Dunkin' Doggies Inc. and, like many other people in the pet business, insists this pull toward indulging our pets is here to stay.

"It wasn't that people didn't love their pets 10 years ago. Corporate America just didn't fill the pet need until recently," she says. "I don't think it's a trend in people — it's a trend in availability."

Continuing to ride this wave, Baldillez plans to have a couple more locations open by the end of the year.

"Anything you can do to fill a need, people are going to take advantage of it," she says. "I know people want their dogs to be happy, so we decided to make it all about the dog. We really hit a niche with this."

Dee Fort of Dee's Doggie Den agrees. With up to 30 dogs — and the occasional dog-oriented cat

— being dropped off at her door daily for daycare, she and her staff never have a dull moment.

"We've been busy ever since we opened our doors," says Fort, who has been boarding pets for eight years. "We're sold out every single day."

Another example that this trend goes beyond simple daycare is Dee's Day at the Spa — a full day of pet pampering, including playtime, a haircut, massage bath, hot oil treatment and a manicure and pedicure.

"People are more likely to have more pets and more money to spend on their dogs these days. This is becoming a part of pop culture," Fort says.

Do-it-yourself dog grooming is also becoming a hit among these pet parents, but DIY doesn't mean people are bathing their pets with the bare necessities. Dunkin'

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DEE FORT/owner, Dee's Doggie Den

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PAMPERED PETS

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Doggies Inc. outfits its washtubs with Hydrosurge, a therapeutic bathing system, and Dirty Dawgz offers after-bath sprays and specialty shampoos, such as oatmeal shampoo for dogs with dry skin.

Part of the allure of shops like Dunkin' Doggies and Dirty Dawgz is making sure customers are supplied with everything they need to walk out with a perfectly polished pooch — not to mention one that's well dressed. (Dirty Dawgz also sells an array of chic little dog outfits.)

Owners of Dirty Dawgz and proud pet parents themselves, Vhea Cannon and Minan Hammer, opened their shop last year. The former pre-school teachers wanted to bring their dogs to work with them, so the idea of starting a business that panders to pets seemed logical.

Cannon says the parents she saw as a pre-school teacher are not that different than the dog owners she sees now.

"Pets are like a kid replacement — like for parents whose kids have gone to college or people who aren't able to have kids," she says. "You get so much from your pets. It's good to give back to them."

Adam White, owner of Nadine's Lakewood Pet Grooming, also sees dotting dog owners every day. Nadine's established itself in the neighborhood more than 35 years ago, and despite several changes in ownership and a move, its popularity hasn't waned.

A corkboard on the wall at Nadine's showcases photos of furry faces surrounded by sequins and lace. Big brown eyes, smiles of satisfaction and lolling tongues greet customers as they wait at



Dee Fort's furry friends can't get enough of her at the doggie den.

the front of the store for their freshly bathed animals.

The back of the store is a whole different scene. An array of brightly colored ribbons and bandanas lines one

wall, ready to complement each dog's personal style. And a corner of the shop is decorated to look like a backyard with a white picket fence and green grass dotted with toys. White calls this area the "playland."

"Besides my obvious love for animals, I do this for the people, too," he says after bringing out one customer's West Highland terrier and handing her a bag full of treats and the dog's report card. (The terrier earned all As.)

White thinks the move toward pampering our pets took off after pet superstores such as PetSmart arrived on the scene. But, he says, pampering pets will always be a priority for true animal lovers.

"They're part of the family," he says, agreeing with Cannon's sentiment. "Pets give so much love, and people



Laura Baldillez strokes Shadow at Dunkin' Doggies Inc.

want to give as much love in return. They're like kids, even if the pet owners have kids."

The days are gone when pets were just animals. As business expands, people are going to find more ways to accommodate their furry friends and more things to buy for them — from

homemade dog biscuits to tiny T-shirts that read "Diva Dog" in rhinestones.

"There's a strong bond there. It's so much like a companion relationship," Baldillez says. "You're going to bend over backwards to tend to them." ♦

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