

Startups demand hard work, long hours

SUE ANGELL, Freelance Writer/April 20, 2007

When her beloved pet Pudding was diagnosed with kidney disease, Andrea Miller Holzheimer became an expert on doggie nutrition and began baking homemade, all-natural dog biscuits for her pooch. She soon realized that other pet owners were also interested in the preservative-free, gourmet bones, and she began selling the posh treats through local retailers. She named her new venture Andy's Bow Wow Bonz.

"I got into this business for the dogs," says Holzheimer, who ran a pet-sitting business before deciding to concentrate exclusively on dog biscuits. "I do what I'm doing for the satisfaction of putting out a good product, but I also like to think that I'm making someone's dog happy."

Unlike many new business owners, Holzhiemer knew exactly what she was getting herself into. By using the profits from her previous business as well as a portion of her savings, Holzheimer was able to avoid borrowing money and going into debt with her new venture.

"The clients from my pet-sitting business are my best customers," Holzheimer says. "They've helped my business grow almost exclusively through word-of-mouth advertising."

The recent pet-food recall hasn't hurt her business, either; demand for organic treats has grown exponentially since the tainted scare. Heinen's in Bainbridge sold out of her products in a week, say Holzheimer; after the store put up a sign advertising the local, all-natural nature of the treats. She estimates that before the recall, the grocery would sell out about every three weeks.

Since selling her first bag of bones in 2002, Holzheimer has seen her business double, she says. The price for an eight-ounce bag of her doggie treats is \$5.50. They're available at Heinen's, Mustard Seed Café, and Joseph-Beth Booksellers. Holzheimer is even planning to launch a new product line—an organic dog treat she affectionately dubbed Sun of a Biscuit.

But success and growth have come with a price. As the lone employee of a small business, Holzheimer gets up at 3 a.m. and works approximately eight hours a day to create, package and deliver the bones she produces in her Mayfield Heights kitchen. During the holiday season, Holzheimer managed to turn out more than 10,000 bones for a multitude of dogs—a feat she doesn't think she'll ever be able to repeat.

"I knew that running my own business would be difficult," says Holzheimer, "but I just wish I could invent a machine that would help me make more dog biscuits!"

Holzheimer's positive experience as a small-business owner is mirrored by the latest statistics from the Small Business Administration (SBA), which show that 44% of new businesses survive for a minimum of four years. This is a far cry from older statistics, in which the SBA stated that 50% of small businesses would fail within their first year, and that 95% would fail within five years.