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Live Well Connoisseur *by Kimberly Tingle*

A Ruff Life

Karen Lynch on pampering your pets

What inspired you to open Style Unleashed?

I have wanted to open a pet boutique for the last few years. I live in Bristol and grew up in Barrington, and there are no pet boutiques in our area. I really like to shop local and there is definitely a need - not only for a local pet boutique, but for a grooming salon in Barrington, as well. Even in a bad economy, people will spend money on their pets, because they're like members of the family. It just made sense.

What are some of the hottest items your store offers for pets?

Thundershirts, which are a drug free solution to dog anxieties; Up Country collars and leads; and Hugglehound dog toys, which are great for chewers. For truly pampered pets, there are Bessie and Bernie fur pet beds, Woof Wear leather and crystal collars, and Dog in the Closet custom harnesses and clothing. We also have great products for pet owners who love their pets.

If you wanted to treat your pet to the most lavish experience Style Unleashed has to offer, which grooming option would you recommend?

A Bubble Bath Paw Treatment, followed by an all-organic spa product bath.

How do you accessorize your pets?

I actually think it is a great idea to coordinate collars, leashes and clothing for your pets, even their carriers. I have a chocolate lab and a beagle who don't wear clothes, but their collars and leads always match. I always make sure we have collars and leads that coordinate with the clothing I sell in the store. I also carry Bowsers and Jax & Bones pet beds that come in multiple shapes and sizes and hundreds of fabrics. A great pet bed should also coordinate with the interior of your home.



What are some locally made products you offer?

I carry Up Country, which is manufactured right in East Providence and produces stylish, well made, affordable pet products. I also carry Quincy & Co. - the owner custom makes raincoats, bandanas and fleece coats for me and Sweet Baboo. The owner is from Fall River and is custom knitting my sweaters. For treats, I carry Taxi Dog Bakery which is located in South Hampton, MA and Polka Dog Bakery in Boston. I work very hard to make sure the majority of my products are made in the USA. It's important to me as well as to the economy.

What trends should pet owners be on the lookout for?

A lot of organic pet food, treats, chews and grooming products. There are a lot of companies who use green materials to make beds, clothing and toys. I would tell owners to start looking for pet products that are not only good for their pets but good for the environment as well, and to look for products that not only look great, but are manufactured to last.

Who is more excited to shop at your store? The owners or the dogs?

It's definitely a toss-up. The owners love the unique, practical, affordable and stylish accessories, toys and snacks I have for their pets and the dogs love to shop themselves. Our furry friends often "poochlift" their favorite toys and treats that are within reach. The dogs love the bully sticks - that is usually where they go first to sneak a treat - and then they go to our stuffed monkey, of all the toys in the store. It is so funny to watch!

You give the dogs report cards after grooming them. What constitutes a good report card? Have you ever failed a particularly naughty one?

Our report cards are used not only to let customers know how their pooches behaved during their grooming appointment - from "A Little Angel" to a "Little Wiggle Worm" to a "Little Devil" - but they also alert owners on skin, coat and teeth conditions they may not be aware of.

Karen owns Style Unleashed, a pet boutique and salon. 232 Waseca Ave., Barrington. 401-245-2600, www.styleunleashedri.com

Photography: Amy Amerantes