

# PET PRODUCT NEWS

THE LEADER  
IN PET SUPPLIES  
MARKETING  
FOR 59 YEARS



September 2005 ■ \$5.00

www.petproductnews.com

Volume 59 ■ No. 9

## Land of Paws Takes Top Honors

*Pet Product News' editors select the two-store Kansas business as Retailer of the Year 2005-2006.*

By **Wendy Bedwell-Wilson**



Land of Paws owners and managers, from left: owners Mark and Patty Daly, managers Kristen Daly and Catelin Carey, and owners Pam and George Gates.

It's not easy to balance on the cutting edge of pet-specialty retail for more than 11 years. In the pet industry, product choice, retail philosophy and service offerings have grown and diversified like so many brands of dog food.

But one pet store continues to stand above the rest.

Land of Paws, with two 4,000-square-foot stores in Prairie Village and Overland Park, Kan., has grown and diversified to stay on that cutting edge. The owners' and managers' over-the-top customer service, dynamite displays and trendsetting product selection for dogs, cats and their owners have earned them the coveted 2005-2006 Pet Product News Retailer of the Year honor.

The award, sponsored by Pet Naturals of Vermont, a division of FoodScience Corp., recognizes excellence in pet-specialty retail. The editors of Pet Product News poured through stacks of submissions and selected Land of Paws as their top dog. The winners will receive the award at a special reception held in Las Vegas during SuperZoo in September.

Owned by Mark Daly, D.V.M., George Gates, D.V.M., and their wives, Patty Daly and Pam Gates, the flagship Prairie Village location opened in October 1994 next to the doctors' veterinary practice, which had served the area's pet owners for 35 years.

"The doctors would have a lot of clients who would lose a dog and ask where they could get another," Patty Daly says. "There just wasn't really anywhere to send them. So they thought, well, who better than us to open a pet store?"

Busy with a booming veterinary practice, the doctors turned to their wives for help. The ladies didn't know a thing about pet retail, but they did know a thing or two about shopping.

"As I look back, I can't believe I did it," Patty admits. "But Pam and I like to shop, we knew what we liked in a retail business and we knew the atmosphere and philosophy we wanted here. So we had that experience, and the guys had the knowledge of animals. It really was a great combination."

Add to that combination the youthful exuberance

of Catelin Carey and Kristen Daly, and success was virtually guaranteed. Joining the team while in high school, Catelin and Kristen worked in the Prairie Village store and soaked up Pam's and Patty's knowledge like a sponge.

"We got the experience of what worked in the store and what didn't," says Kristen, who is the Dalys' daughter. "We learned first-hand how to do this. When we graduated college in 2003, we saw the opportunity to expand the store and open a new one."

The Overland Park location—only 15 minutes away from the first store—opened in July 2003 and is managed by Catelin and Kristen, both in their mid-20s. They hire employees, handle all the paperwork and do all the buying, keeping ever mindful of the original philosophy developed over the years: to provide extraordinary customer service, honesty, quality and specialized merchandise to their customers.

### Customer Service Rules

As the foundation of their business, customer service runs through all facets of the dog-and-cat specialty retailer. From product selection to merchandising to choosing puppies and grooming services, the owners and managers ensure their clients are given everything they need.

"We're really focused on the customer," Catelin says. "When the customer comes in, we'll walk with them around the store and show them the new things. And because we also sell puppies, we'll talk to them about what dog is right for their families. We take a lot of time with them."

They also stay up to date on their merchandise, she says. They search for the newest trends and stay on top of the hottest products in the industry.

"Land of Paws has always had really great pet supplies," Catelin says. "And it always had the boutique side also, so we have a whole section of our store that has breed-specific items and gifts for the pet lover, with picture frames, purses and things like that."

They all shop pet trade shows and gift shows to find the trendsetting merchandise, Kristen says.

"Pam and Patty go to every trade show, including the Atlanta gift shows and the pet trade shows," she says. "They really stay on top of the trends, and what made that store unique was the whole boutique side as well as the pet supplies all in one store."

She and Catelin follow their lead by attending trade shows, too, but their shopping list looks a bit different from their more mature and conservative counterparts.

"We do all go to the trade shows together, so we'll talk over things and show each other things," Patty says. "But we do bring different things into each store, which is nice. If you happen to live in this area, it's kind of fun to go back and forth."

Patty says that while the Prairie Village customers are a little older and more established, the Overland Park customers tend to be younger, with more discretionary income.

"We carry different things relative to our clientele," Catelin says. "Patty and Pam have an older, more conservative customer base than we do. So at our location, we have more clothing, like the bling collars and stuff like that."

Services vary between the stores, too. The flagship location offers grooming services; Overland Park does not.

"Whether to include grooming was a big decision when we opened the second store," Patty says. "We were a little bit afraid. We didn't want to change something that's been successful. But finding good groomers is very difficult, and adding grooming and tubs adds a lot of expense. So we decided to take grooming out and see if it makes it on its own."

It's doing just fine without grooming, she adds.

Obedience classes are also offered at the Prairie Village store, which has a basement, unlike the Overland Park location, Patty says.

"We have a trainer who comes in and we have several classes a week that last for about six weeks," she



Weekly staff meetings help make everyone a team with one goal: providing customers with the best possible service.

says. "Kristen and Catelin refer their clients to our facility for that."

### Puppies Plus

Both locations sell puppies, and that's where the doctors get involved.

"The veterinarians handle the puppies," Patty says. "We work with licensed breeders in Kansas and Missouri, so they work with the puppies, and when they come in, they go directly to the vet hospital to be checked."

Few retailers can offer that level of customer service.

"Our vets give their home number for after clinic hours," Kristen says. "People can call for just random questions regarding their puppies."

The doctors have been working with the breeders for more than 10 years. They know them personally; they've inspected their facilities and they've established solid relationships with them, Kristen says.

"When customers have had a really great experience, they'll tell all of their friends," Catelin says. "A lot of the word spread that way. People tell us that this is the only place they'd buy a puppy. Customers understand that if they have any problem, they can go straight to the veterinarians. And that's a great feeling to have."

Land of Paws also works with local shelters, including Animal Haven, a rescue group that adopts out dogs and cats. Last October, a fundraiser brought together the pets and vets for a parade and party to benefit the organization.

"For an \$8 donation, the vets would clip your pets' nails," Catelin says. "And we donated 100 percent of



Land of Paws' philosophy is to provide extraordinary customer service, honesty, quality and specialized merchandise to customers.



Moving products around keeps the stores interesting, fresh and new.



The Overland Park location of Land of Paws caters to a younger clientele and offers more clothing and other boutique items.

that to Animal Haven. We had a huge turnout. People donated even if they didn't have their pets' nails clipped."

The event raised more than \$500 for Animal Haven.

"We just wanted to let people in our community know that we sell puppies, but we support the local shelters, too," Kristen says. "We want to provide the opportunity for people to buy puppies, but there are the adopted ones as well."

Patty's and Pam's strengths were in setting the stores' standards; Kristen's and Catelin's forte is merchandising. Creating displays since their high school days, they catch customers' eyes with Gap-inspired front windows that highlight the latest in doggie couture.

"It's always been something we've had an interest in," Kristen says. "We have a creative edge. The newest thing we've been doing is enlarging pictures of dogs, and we'll put them in a big window display and dress them in clothes and all the accessories and really showcase the product with actual dogs wearing them. The merchandising brings customers in."

They come from all over the country. Regular customers invite their out-of-town guests to visit the one-of-a-kind shop. And travelers who read through a local visitor magazine tour the store, too.

"We've had great success with an advertisement we placed in Guest Informant, a hard-back magazine found in 8,800 hotel rooms that reach more than 1.6 million guests who visit the Kansas City area," Kristen says.

For regular customers, Kristen and Catelin keep the store interesting by changing the floor plan and updating displays to get their merchandise moving.

"If things aren't moving so well, then we'll make a plan to move them," Catelin says. "It's important to keep things moving around the store. Keeps it interesting, fresh and new."

Recently, their breed-specific merchandise wasn't selling too well, so they rearranged the store, relocated the items closer to the register and came up with some spectacular displays.

It worked. They noticed an increase in sales by 83 percent, Kristen says.

"You think, if you move it here it will sell," she says. "If it doesn't, move it again. Keep moving it until it does."

### Communicate for Success

As Pam and Patty showed 11 years ago, communication between employees, managers and owners is key to success, Catelin says.

"We talk to Pam and Patty and the doctors every day," she says. "We're always on the phone with them keeping the stores linked together, keeping everyone on the same page."

Kristen agrees.

"Communication is so important," she says. "We have weekly meeting with each other and our staff. Everyone's a team in our store, and we all work together with one goal of providing the customer the best service possible. Keeping that all intact makes us successful."

They may work in different stores, but their philosophies are in the same vein.

"We learned so much first-hand from Pam and Patty," Kristen says. "They've been a great inspiration to us. They're our role models."

Catelin also credits the stores' founders.

"Without them, we wouldn't be here," she says. "We're thankful for that."

*Wendy Bedwell-Wilson is a freelance writer in Hawaii.*