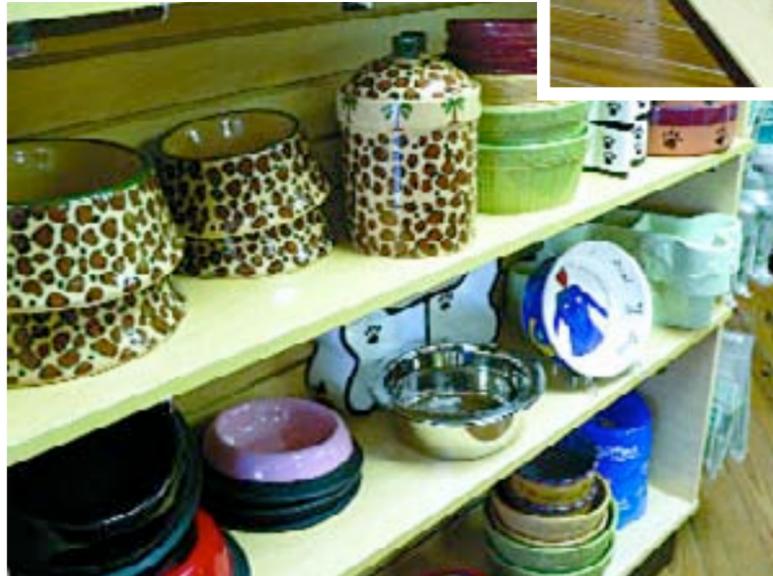


Animal Magnetism

Island Paws



Trasi Sharp (above left) and Liza Clouse sell gifts and treats suitable for even the most pampered pets.

by Jennifer Workman Lessinger

When Trasi Sharp and Liza Clouse decided to “sell everything” and move to Sanibel in December 2003, they planned to buy or open an island eatery. After all, Sharp owned a restaurant for fifteen years in Kansas City, Missouri, and Clouse was a human resources consultant. The restaurant business seemed to make sense. The only problem was they didn’t see a need for another restaurant on Sanibel.

What they did see a need for was a place where pets could get some serious pampering. So they found a retail location in the Olde Sanibel Shoppes, extensively remodeled the space, which had

been vacant for seven years, and painted the walls a cheery shade of yellow. They researched products from gifts and treats to foods and shampoos. In October 2004, they opened Island Paws, a pet gift and supply shop that also offers full- and self-service pet washing.

While retail is a new venture for them, Clouse and Sharp have been able to rely on their own love of animals, along with some helpful guidance from product vendors, to determine what to keep in stock. They focus on organic and natural foods and treats as well as unique gifts. It’s not everywhere that you can get a collar for your pet complete with personalized rhinestone lettering. Such a product selection, along with the shop’s location and



Customers can have their pets washed by Sharp and Clouse or do it themselves.



timing, has been good for business.

“Ironically, we opened the same time the toll went up,” says Clouse, referring to the October 2004 increase in the Sanibel Causeway toll from \$3 to \$6. “It helped us that people out here are trying to buy what they can on-island. It’s convenient for people that we’re out here.”

It’s also convenient that Island Paws offers full- and self-serve pet washing. After a day at the beach, pets can make a quick visit to the shop’s bathing room, which features professional, waist-high tubs, aprons, towels, dryers, brushes, and combs.

The combination of supplies, gifts, and grooming seems to be working well for Clouse and Sharp. Business has been so good, in fact, that they haven’t had enough time to bring all their ideas to fruition. They talk about adding a doggie bakery and sponsoring events to benefit the Humane Society. They also want to host doggie happy hour, where owners can bring their pets to sample new treats.

In the meantime, Clouse and Sharp concentrate on establishing a relationship with customers and their pets. They want people to have fun coming to the store— with or without their furry friends. Customers are encouraged to bring photos of their pets for display on one of the store’s walls.

Pet owners themselves, both Clouse

and Sharp are happy to talk to patrons about their animal companions. “Some people are really quiet when they come in,” says Clouse. “But as soon as you ask about their pets, they light up.”

Island Paws is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Olde Sanibel Shoppes at 630 Tarpon Bay Rd., Suite 5, Sanibel. For more information, call 239/395-1464 or visit www.islandpaws.com.

Jennifer Workman Lessinger is a freelance writer and the owner of a very spoiled German shorthair pointer named Riley Roo.



A four-legged Island Paws visitor checks out some of the shop’s treats.