



# Georganne & Rich — On The Road

By RICH KIZER & GEORGANNE BENDER

## Customers of all Kinds

Adventures with the Four-legged, Feathered, Finned, and Furry

**O**ur families are big on pets. The assortment in our two households alone could form a small petting zoo. Between us, we've adopted a dog, three cats, a couple of fish, a horse, and a rat. And except for the horse (who lives at a riding center) each of our four-legged friends eats and sleeps indoors in one of our respective homes. Even the rat, the subject of an 8th grade science project, is an important part of the family. Don't laugh, rats make excellent pets – Pickles comes when you call him, plays catch when you toss him a rat-sized ball, and even enjoys watching TV with Georganne's kids.

We're not unique. Lots of people consider their pets as much a part of the family as the humans in the household. Today, dogs and cats spend their days at expensive pet day care centers, so they won't be lonely while mommy and daddy are at work. These people would never consider leaving Spot at a kennel when they travel when he'd be far more comfortable at one of those five-star pet palaces that are popping up all over the country. You might have to choose Motel 6 so your cat can stay at a luxury pet spa, but you'll sleep better knowing she's in good hands.

Some people openly refer to their pets as "the kids." So is it any wonder that a recent study revealed that the average

woman spends more time choosing a holiday gift for her pet

Shop, all working together to help you make your house a home, whatever species you share it with.

Rocky's Pet Shop is named for Marsha and Marty's pet ferret, Rocky, who can often be seen riding on Marsha's shoulder helping her help customers. He even has his own customer following



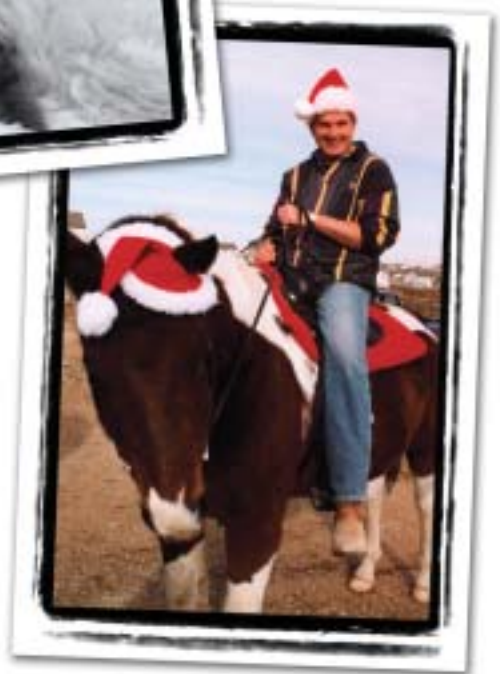
than for her husband?

All of this fuss over pets may come as a surprise to you, but it's business as usual to retailers like PetCo and PetSmart – big box stores that cater to those of us who cater to family members with fins, fur, and feathers. When we were kids, pet stores were smelly, dark, and dirty. Not anymore. These spotless showplaces are merchandised to perfection. And to encourage impulse sales.

But that's not news to Marsha and Marty Kapchinski, owners of M&M Farm & Home in Schofield, Wisconsin. Inside M&M you'll find a Ben Franklin Crafts, an Ace Hardware, and Rocky's Pet

and, in fact, hosted several in-store events.

We love "Rocky's Hamster School." The \$5 tuition fee includes a hamster of your choice, a temporary hamster house, plus



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enough food to last one week. After picking their hamsters, the kids attend Marsha and Rocky's hour-long class on how to take care of their new pets.

Who would have guessed that almost every one of those lucky hamsters would go home with shiny new cages, bedding, dishes, water bottles, gourmet food, and enough toys to keep them happy until the next trip to M&M Farm & Home? Surely not Marsha and Marty.

Crazy idea?

Yep. Crazy like a ... ferret!

In our travels we've met many retailers whose pets have become just another member of the store team. Instead of aprons, some even wear bandannas and their own name tags. One savvy scrapbook retailer's dog even "writes" her store's newsletter! We know that for each pet event we share in a seminar, we'll hear from at least two more retailers who have pet events of their own to tell about.

Here are few of our favorites.

## SANTA PAWS DAY

Santa Claus visits lots of stores at Christmas time, but Randy Hruska, owner of the Ace Hardware Store in Rock Springs, Wyoming, wanted to do something a little bit different, so he came up with "Santa Paws Day."

On Santa Paws Day, customers can bring their pets to the store for a visit with Santa. \$5 buys them a Polaroid picture of their pet sitting on Santa's lap. Randy donates one dollar out of the five to a local animal shelter.

It's quite a sight to see! Dogs and cats and customers patiently wait for their turn to visit Santa – but that's not all. As the big guy in the red suit, Randy's held many a creature: dogs, cats, fish, mice, ferrets, lizards, rats, rabbits, snakes – you name it. But he had to set some ground rules the year a customer brought in a 350-pound Vietnamese pot-bellied pig, and tried to hoist it onto Randy's lap!

## THE PET PSYCHIC

At HIA's \$1.99-an-Idea Luncheon this year, we met Polly McFadden, owner of The Stamp Act in El Paso, Texas. Polly had heard customers discussing a television show on Animal Planet called *The Pet Psychic*. The series features Sonja Fitzpatrick, a psychic whose telepathic abilities enable her to

communicate with animals. Polly's customers' enthusiasm over this program inspired her to come up with an animal communication event of her own.

Polly's event was hosted by her dog, Chloe. In addition to the pet psychic, Chloe also had a palm reader on hand to entertain her human guests. Customers paid \$15 each for a visit with the pet psychic, \$5 of which went to a local animal shelter.

The day of the event, both man and beast were lined up outside the store even before it opened. Once inside, they wound in and around the aisles. Polly's traffic-building event quickly became a sales-building event as customers redeemed the coupons they were given to buy supplies to commemorate the day they found out what Fido was really thinking.

Bubba, so why not give him an event of his own?

"Bring Bubba a Bone" was genius in its simplicity. Customers who brought Bubba a bone on the day of the sale received special discounts that varied from department to department.

Bob seriously under-estimated Bubba's celebrity, thinking the dog would get a handful of bones, and he'd have a few laughs with customers. Wrong. Bubba received 427 bones that day, and the event was a huge success. Bob was so pleased with the turn out, that he's seriously considering renaming next year's event "Bring Bob a Beer!"

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## BRING BUBBA A BONE

A Wisconsin garden center retailer named Bob told us he was bored with the usual events he ran each year in his nursery and gift shop. He wanted to shake things up in the store and create a buzz about town.

While sitting at his desk one day, he looked down at his dog, Bubba, who was fast asleep at his feet. That's when it hit him – customers come to the store just to visit

events are low cost and easy to put together – use bag stuffers and in-store signing to advertise your event. Send out a few press releases to alert the media. (Drop us an e-mail at [info@kizerandbender.com](mailto:info@kizerandbender.com) for a free copy of How to Write a Press Release).

It's a proven fact that pet owners spend piles of money each year on their furry friends – why shouldn't they spend some of that money in your store? ♦