

# Upscale, Uptown and Loving It!

By Elissa Matulis Myers

“It all started when I bought a \$24 barrette for my female Yorkie, Gabi. The barrette broke on the first day, so I went out and bought a glue gun to fix it,” says Syndee Cooper, owner of the upscale Uptown Pet Bistro and Boutique. What began as a practical fix has turned into the realization of a life-long dream —running a stylish (a la Paris, Rome, London) shop of wonderful clothes and accessories for pets.

Of course when Syndee, as a little girl, dreamed of running her own couture boutique, the clients she had in mind were petite, fashion conscious women. What she is doing is catering to the luxury tastes of little dogs (and big dogs) and their owners—offering unique dresses and crystal necklaces and embroidered collars, and yes, barrettes and bows for little top knots and pony tails, along with fancy treats and very healthy food.

## A Fantasy Land for Pets

The store, on Market Commons Drive in the Fair Lakes shopping area is a fantasy land. The walls are beautifully adorned with hand-painted murals of Labrador and Golden Retrievers, a Jack Russell Terrier leaping in the air and irresistible mutts, Great Danes and German Shepherds, and of course, lots of Yorkies and other little dogs. The dog paintings are placed among life-like flowering trees, under fluffy clouds.

There's a cat section too, with big eyed cats and paraphernalia that will



*Syndee Cooper and her Yorkie, Nykee in the store.*



**Favorite dog movie?** Lady and the Tramp—Disney's elegant little Cocker would love the Uptown Bistro and Boutique!



**Dog of her own?** Three very well dressed and adorned Yorkies—Nykee, Mykee, and “my toothless wonder,” Gabi. “Gabi ate food that destroyed her teeth. Now I know better,” says Syndee. And she has two cats—Sebastian and Spencer.



**Advice for other petcentric careerists?** “Be different and follow your own heart. You have to find your own niche.”



**Favorite Product?** “There are so many, it's hard to say. I love the Chokefree harnesses and the pretty embroidered velvet and satin lined collars.”



**Special events?** “We just had a wonderful formal portrait day, and we are planning a fashion show.” The front window of the store changes monthly, and is themed. May's theme was “May Flowers” and June will feature “June Bugs.”

keep your feline amused and in style.

Syndee grew up an only child in Philadelphia, and was born loving animals. “I was always bringing home turtles or other creatures that I found, but I desperately wanted a dog. My mother was afraid of them, and wouldn’t let me have one, but finally when I was twelve she relented and I got a Chihuahua. It was funny—at first my Mom wouldn’t have anything to do with him, but one day something frightened him and he jumped into her lap, and they became inseparable. I had my dog, but he was her dog too.”

The Boutique is not Syndee’s first foray into sales. Trained as a medical technician, she went into medical sales and became a national sales manager, and then beauty supply sales, building million dollar territories. “I learned that the secret to successful sales is building relationships, respecting other people, and letting them know that you genuinely appreciate their business. Customers need to know that you are honest and that you really care about them. I don’t need a ‘return policy,’ – if a customer is unhappy with something I sold, or if it doesn’t work for them, they can bring it back. Period. They don’t even need a receipt since I keep a computer record of what they bought. I want to be the ‘Nordstrom’ of the little stores – delivering great customer service.”

## Good Will Rewarded

“I believe,” says Cooper, “that if you throw good will out there, good things come back to you.” Looks like it’s working. There are a range of friends—human and canine—that drop into the shop regularly to say hello and see what’s new. One, a chocolate Lab, wandered in and walked around one morning, politely and carefully inspecting the neat and colorful packages of Bistro Bites, and considering carefully the just-for-dogs Redskin sweat shirts and Redskinettes dresses. By the time his owner showed up to say hello, he was gratefully swallowing the last of a treat from Syndee.

Syndee has put her medical background to good use studying and learning about dog nutrition and healthy eating. Beyond the “just great five-star dog food” she sells, she offers a variety of products that address specific medical issues that dogs experience—dry itchy skin, joint discomfort, allergies. “I work with my customers to make sure that what they buy helps with whatever problem they are addressing—and I learn more about what works and what doesn’t from them,” she says.

Syndee’s products are unique. There are one-of-a-kind handmade dresses, cute play clothes, and even an authentic antique army outfit complete with three gold stars and a medal. There are glorious Swarovski crystal necklaces, or necklaces created from unusual exotic stones and jewels that she makes by hand. “The doggie jewelry is sturdy enough to withstand a little rough and tumble play, but has a break-away feature to prevent choking.”

When asked what the future holds for expansion of the business, Cooper says “I just turned 61 and I am happy with one store. My plan is to be the best little store and have the best customer service! Life is Good. Plus, I have the best boss I have ever had!” **ND**

*Elissa Myers is a writer in Northern Virginia. She lives in Springfield with her tireless Black Lab Indi and writes a daily column for the on-line Examiner.*