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Feels Like Home

Godfrey's—Welcome to Dogdom invites leisurely browsing.

By **Devon McPhee**

It's easy for customers to feel at home at Godfrey's—Welcome to Dogdom, a pet boutique in Mohnton, Pa. The store, a restored 1867 bank barn-style building, looks like a dog lover's home, complete with doggie-themed living room, whining and dining room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and out-and-about room.

The store's concept was inspired by the increased integration of pets into the family and into home life, says owner Barb Emmett.

"Years ago, when I was thinking of opening a shop, I thought about dogs and products and how important both are to the home," she says. "Then I thought that if I ever opened a store, the products should be part of a home. That's how it happened."

Each of the store's departments incorporates homey elements into its floor plan—a couch and a coffee table displaying books and mail order catalogs in the living room, a dining table and a hutch with dog-inspired dishes in the whining and dining room. There are always a romantic soy candles burning, fresh coffee brewing and a dish of chocolates available for indulging. Golden retriever Jackson Godfrey, the store's namesake and official greeter, roams from room to room.

Set on four bucolic acres, everything about the 1,500-square-foot store was designed to encourage patrons to relax and take their time, Emmett says.

"We wanted to make people feel that this is a place where they can slow down and browse, take a look around or sit on the couch and flip through a



Godfrey's staff, left. On the floor, left to right, are Eli and Godfrey, official greeters. Seated in front are Cheryl Stralo, senior sales associate, and Barb Emmett, president and owner. Standing in back are Renee Caspescha and Gloria Meek, sales associates. The store, above, is a restored 1867 barn-style building.

mail order catalog," she says.

Since the store sells mainly gift and impulse items, not necessities, the relaxed, welcoming atmosphere helps encourage purchases, Emmett says.

"It was important that we create an environment where people didn't want to run in and run out," she says. "The longer they are in the store, the more likely they are to make a purchase. And, when a conversation starts, 'Are you finding what you need?' it also encourages purchases."

For creating and maintaining this inviting atmosphere, and for displaying products in a fresh and playful manner, Godfrey's—Welcome to Dogdom

was named the Pet Product News 2006-2007 Retailer of the Year for merchandising.

Displaying with Purpose

Though the store's departments are atypical, deciding which products go where is easy, according to Emmett.

"A product comes along and it just makes sense where it goes," she says.

For instance, show pieces such as pottery and porcelain, as well as purses, stationary and jewelry, are housed in the living room. Glassware, linens, feeding dishes and sculptures are in the whining and dining room. Treats, food and treat jars are in

kitchen. The bedroom houses apparel for people and dogs. Crates, leashes, carriers and toys are in the out-and-about room. And the bathroom carries spa products, such as shampoos, conditioners, towels and soaps.

Product displays also align with the purpose of each room, Emmett says, and provide an opportunity to cross-merchandise.

"We will cross-merchandise certain areas," she says. "For example, we have a portable dish that goes in the out-and-about area, but we also included it in a temporary display in the kitchen. The display was for granola. It included buckets, a stuffed dog wearing apparel the store sells, a portable dish, a book on holistic health, treats and cans of food."

Holidays provide easy themes for displays. During Thanksgiving, the store set up a display on the whining and dining room table that incorporated food, dishes and picture frames. During the 2006 Chinese New Year, the year of the dog, the table was decorated with red and gold and various Chinese New Year decorations. A wok served as a centerpiece, and around it was a new line of pottery and candles as well as boxed fortune cookies and sushi cookies.

A sale accompanied the Chinese New Year display. The store replaced the ornaments on its Christmas tree with "lucky monkey" envelopes. Inside each envelope was a disk representing a Chinese coin marked with a discount, from 10 percent to 40 percent. Customers were invited to take an envelope off the tree and receive whatever discount was in their envelope.

"The event was a success be-

cause the displays were colorful and they integrated new products that made sense in the display," Emmett says. "The timing of the event was also right for our customers. It gave them a reason to come out to the shop after the holidays."

Destination Location

Located about 7 miles from Redding, Pa., and about 45 miles from Philadelphia, the store uses special events and its peaceful setting to draw customers.

"We're a destination loca-



For the year of the dog, a tree was decorated with lucky money envelopes.

tion," Emmett says. "Customers are always saying that this is their fun place, their hobby, that they love coming out here."

Godfrey's hosts at least one event per month to pull customers from the two nearest cities to its rural location. The events are usually advertised in local papers and on the boutique's website. Past events have included book signings, birthday and anniversary parties, photo sessions and animal communicator workshops.

It also offers special services



Food, treats and treat jars are displayed in the kitchen area.

AT A GLANCE

Godfrey's

Location: 4267 New Holland Road, Mohnton, Pa.

Owner: Barb Emmett

Website: www.godfreysdogdom.com

Size: 1,500 square feet

Employees: Three part time

Years in Business: Two

Products Offered: Full range of products for dogs, including accessories, treats, food, clothing and gift items



Pottery, purses, stationery and jewelry find a home in the living room.

to entice customers. The store lets customers create wish lists to let their family and friends know which products they desire. It offers home delivery of food. It custom-orders canine apparel. It also hosts members-only doggie playgroups in its huge backyard.

Of course, the store's prod-



The bedroom holds clothes and pillows.

ucts remain the overarching reason customers come to the store. And Emmett works hard at keeping her inventory fresh and one of a kind.

"My mission is to find the best-quality products that will enrich the dog's life with their human," she says.

To fulfill her mission, Emmett studies high-end dog magazines such as *Modern Dog* and *Bark*, attends regional art shows, goes to trade shows, networks with fellow boutique owners, and keeps an eye on the goings-

on at the big-box stores.

When buying, she says she favors local artists who are deeply committed to their craft.

"From the beginning I was devoted to building relationships with like-minded people who care and have concern for what they are doing," she says.

Yet Emmett says she's also learned to require a certain level of professionalism from her vendors.

"I made some blunders in the beginning," she says. "A lot of these artisans are not business people, and they couldn't deliver on their contracts. I learned to be more selective and make some demands—make sure they could meet certain basic business requirements."

Online Adventure

Having spent time in the corporate world as a Web content manager before opening the store in July 2004, Emmett says she recognizes the Internet as a strong component of success in retail.



The whining and dining room holds appropriate doggie merchandise.

"We believe it's important to keep a website fresh and current, so we're really working on that this year," she says.

In June, the store began sending email blasts to customers to inform them of store events and sales. By the end of 2006, it plans to have online ordering available.

In the fall, Godfrey's will offer puppy training classes and

obedience lessons taught by a local husband-and-wife team.

Beyond that, Emmett says her plan for the future Godfrey's is maintenance of its original vision.

"We celebrate a certain lifestyle," she says. "We're about having joy and fun with the life you live together with your dog. My goal is to stay in line with this mission." ■