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What's INSIDE



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PHOTO BY UNSIE ZUEGE

Karen Howe and her lap dog Phoebe are the co-proprietors of Lulu & Luigi, an upscale dog boutique in St. Louis Park and Wayzata. Howe and her daughter Liz Sand were on the forefront of catering to people who love to dress up their darling dogs.

BARKUS PARADE

What: Dogs dressed as characters from books, movies and TV.
When: Saturday, Aug. 11. Parade check in: 8:30-9:30 a.m. Start: 10 a.m.
Where: City Center Park, next to the Chanhassen Library
Info: Registration forms, fees, and rules may be picked up at the Chanhassen Library, or online at www.ChanFriends.org. Participation is open to the first 50 dogs.

Has chic style gone to the dogs?

By Unsie Zuege

You're not imagining things. You are seeing more doggie couture from sassy T-shirts, sweet little sun dresses, and tuxedos to booties, running shoes and warmup suits. Target Corporation recognizes a strong consumer trend when it sees one, and in 2005, introduced, among other doggie clothing and accessories, its Isaac Mizrahi designer line for fashion savvy pooches.

Spectators at Chanhassen's fourth annual Barkus Dog Parade Saturday can expect to see costumed dogs dressed simply in a kerchief to dog divas covered in bling. Some dogs may be accessorized with dog duds from Target or any number of specialty shops that

Dogs continued from left

cats to dogs and the people who love them.

But Bev Hirt, Friends of the Charbonneau Library volunteer and the engine behind the library's Barkus parade, is content to stress that the parade is not about elaborate costumes, but fun.

"You can just tie a bandana around your dog's neck and there's Blackberry Flax," Hirt said. "Costumes do not have to be fancy."

Hirt will once again be mistress of ceremonies, announcing each of the dogs and humans.

"I have fun," Hirt said. Hirt, a dancer and performer in her teens, admits that "it's the fun coming out of me."

The Friends of the Charbonneau Library sponsored Barkus after Hirt introduced the idea, based on a similar parade in her former city of New Orleans. The Barkus is celebrated as part of Mardi Gras festivities there.

"I'm thrilled," Hirt said about the local parade's popularity. "My New Orleans friends can't believe we have Barkus up north. I just say 'Yes, but it's living here now.'"

"It's for the children in Charbonneau," she said, "although we have some crazy fun-loving adults, too. People love to come and see the parade. Last year I saw two older women come early with their lawn chairs and set them up right in front for a good view. They laughed, they clapped. And I don't think they had any connection to any of the dogs and their owners. They just came to enjoy the parade."

Planning for Barkus begins in March, when organizers begin to call on sponsors and donations for the goodie bags that are provided for all participating dogs. The goodie bags include homemade biscuits baked by the Senior Center, oranges and treats from local businesses.

The Senior Center is again participating with Barkus and volunteers will sell baked goods and have coffee and water on hand. This year, a local photographer will set up an informal studio so owners and their pets can have a portrait taken on site.

A \$40 billion business

We love our pets, whether they are the conventional dog, cat, hamster, or bird, even the more exotic snake or lizard or oddball hermit crab, rat or ferret. While families have always doted on their pets, in recent years, we've become even more indulgent and the market reflects our desire to incorporate K9s or f4s into our family lives even more intensely.

According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMMA), the pampered pets industry is estimated to be a \$40

billion industry in 2007, up from \$30.5 billion in 2006.

For Liz Sand, it all started when she adopted Lulu, a Maltese, four years ago. At the time, she was working in Chicago in marketing. Lulu melted her heart and Sand admits she was so enamored of her little bundle of love that she could barely drag herself to work.

Talking with her mom, Sand realized that she wanted to open a dog boutique. It would enable her to spend more time with Lulu and cater to other dog lovers just like her.

At the time, there weren't a lot of dog boutiques around, Sand said, just big box pet stores that had the basics "but nothing high end or boutiquey," she said. So she and her business partner, her mother Karen Howe, opened their first shop in St. Louis Park.

The response was exciting even before they opened their doors.

"We had people ask to be put on our mailing list so they would know when we had our grand opening," Sand said. "Since then, we've built a real sense of community in the store. People bring their dogs to the store. People make plans to meet at the store on Saturdays, get the dogs treats, and then they go across the street for coffee with their dogs."

While Sand said that some of the merchandise — such as dog strollers — can prompt some laughs and joking, they also can be useful for older, arthritic dogs, or for tiny dogs like Lulu.

"I've taken her on walks around Lake Calhoun in Minneapolis," Sand said. "After a while, she'll just sit down. She's not walking anymore. So then I carry her. And even though she's six pounds, she starts to get heavy when you're on a walk."

Nothing is weird anymore

Even life jackets make sense, "especially for the barrel-chested dogs," Sands said. "They have a more difficult time swimming. And we just assume all dogs know how to swim. Some don't. A lot of stuff is practical. Nothing is weird anymore."

"I have customers come in saying, 'I'm planning a dog birthday party — am I weird?'" Sand laughed. "Well, I'm going to a dog's bark birthday this weekend. People have an idea of the type of party they're having. They get treats from the bakery case, party favors, toys and presents for the birthday dog."

Sand said that in the beginning, there was a limited group of vendors. Now it's booming. There's more competition among vendors and even the more mainstream stores like Target

are recognizing the dog clothing and accessories market.

"It's a \$40 billion industry," Sand said. "But it's not just accessories. A lot of that is food and treats. Every dog has to eat and with the recent heated dog food recall, people are becoming more knowledgeable about pet food. We've seen people ask about organic food and the premium quality dog foods."

Big box business

Joshua Thomas, a spokesman at Target Corporation, said that the dog clothing and accessory boom is a reflection of today's customers and their active lifestyles.

"We know pets are truly becoming members of the family," Thomas said. "Pet owners want to provide items to make their pets feel right at home. And pet clothing and accessories reflect our guests' personalities and their dogs'." Dog clothing mirrors trends for men and women overall. In summer we have T-shirts, outfits in camo and bright colors. This summer we had green and pink camo that was reflected on the people clothing side and the pet side as well."

The Byerly's of pet food

Steve Rosenthal, owner of Pet Stop, a pet food and supply store, on 10th in Charbonneau. While he doesn't sell dog clothing or have any strong feelings about people who like to dress up their dogs, he admits he's much more concerned about pet nutrition. He likes to educate his customers about the ingredients in dog and cat foods and why it's important to read the labels.

"After the pet food scare, I only had 10 or 20 calls from people," Rosenthal said. "When I asked customers later why they didn't call, they said, 'You talk to me and I figure you're right.' On the other hand, my sister lives in Moorhead and a store she knows got 500 calls right off the bat."

According to Rosenthal, the three worst ingredients in pet food are soy, wheat, and corn. Corn is the worst, and if you notice a dog licking its paws, it's probably an allergic response to corn in the food.

Rosenthal sells pet treats, even some rawhide strips, but he's not a big fan.

"They have a lot of salt that dehydrates, and sometimes rawhides can chip into small pieces and get stuck in the digestive tract," he said. "If he had the space would he ever expand into dog costume and be the Nordstrom of dog wear?"

"No," he said. "I don't think so. I would rather be the Byerly's for dogs."



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