



Woman bakes up doggone good biscuits for canine friends



Photo by Submitted

By Dona Dreeland Staff Writer
August 4, 2011

Nancy Hans of Cranberry Township is hoping that these dog days of summer last a long, long time.

It's not about the heat and humidity but rather the focus on man's favorite four-legged friends. Since her website went live in June, she's eager for more and more people to check in at Woof Stop Barkery. What they'll find is a warm welcome, lots of information and an outlet to order thoughtfully-baked treats for their household pooches.

Hans had been baking organic dog biscuits for years, beginning in 2001, not only for her pets but also for neighbors', families' and friends'.

Through their encouragement, compliments and connections — not to mention the fast-wagging tails of canine customers, she's expanding her marketing footprint via the Internet.

What she offers are flavored doggy treats free of animal byproducts, artificial colors, flavors, fillers and preservatives. The biscuits also are free of wheat, corn, soy and gluten.

She credits her grandmother as her inspiration in the kitchen and her love of dogs with the direction of her new enterprise. It came after a change in profession when she worked part time at a veterinarian's office and part time as an assistant dog trainer.

"I did some soul-searching and considered what I wanted to be involved in," she said.

With her new jobs so canine-oriented, her decision to transform her hobby came easily. Its name was born in flight as she and her husband traveled on vacation.

She started with a single recipe that her two pets, Sadie and Abbie, found to be delicious. Later, recipes were built on the first to produce meat-, peanut-butter-and-honey; pumpkin-and-cinnamon; and sweet-potato-and-parsley-flavored treats. Only if her German shepherd and huskie/lab mix taste-testers approved were the biscuits offered for sale.

"Food is important to us and our pets, and we're paying more attention," said Hans, 48.

Even dogs can have food allergies, she explained, which disappear when a new, less-processed diet is introduced.

She purchases her organic grains from Frankferd Farms Foods, a mill in Saxonburg. While organic items are slightly more expensive, the quality of the product is higher, she said. She works primarily with Pennsylvania companies for her other ingredients.

"I have a sense of flavors that go together," she said of the experimentation in her home kitchen.

"I just had to determine the right amount of ingredients."

When the baking is done, the medium-sized, heart-shaped biscuits cool with their little paw prints etched in place.

"I've tasted all of them," she said to see if the mix of the human-grade ingredients was a good one.

"They're better right from the oven when they're soft."

Other customers have told her that they've shared a treat or two with their pups.

Recently, she was asked to design a birthday cake for Perfect Fit Canines in Churchill. The company helps to orchestrate the training of service dogs for those with autism. Two of their dogs had turned 1-year-old, and the staff wanted to celebrate.

"It was 15 inches and in the shape of a large dog bone," Hans described.

She created smaller bones for the guest dogs as favors.

Hans soon will add the cakes to her website inventory, and she'll continue her association with Animal Friends. Every adopted dog goes home with a bag of sample treats. During the Memorial Day Mutt Strut, a fundraiser for the organization, Hans supplied 500 samples for those who attended.

The biscuits are sold in half-pound, pound, a customized sample pound and sample servings.

While the Internet shopping side of Woof Stop grows, she's making connections with local retailers to carry her product. Perhaps, a bakery owner may consider carrying barkery products, too.

She described her typical customer as "anyone who enjoys the companionship of a dog or someone who knows a dog lover."

There's a whole host of possibilities in Woof Stop's future, such as fruit-flavored biscuits or even cat treats.

Right now, she wants to concentrate on dogs via the biscuits and by spending time with Sadie and Abbie.

The girls were a long time coming for someone who had always loved the animals.

Circumstances always had prevented her from having pets, but 10 years ago, she welcomed them into the family.

"A home is not complete without a dog," she said.

Whether her Woof Stop biscuits are used in bits for training or for everyday treats as a long day ends, Hans will be happy.

She'll judge success for her enterprise on quality rather than quantity.

"If we make \$500,000 or \$5 million, I want the clients to be happy and the dogs healthy," she said.

To find out more about Woof Stop Barkery, call 724-776-6863, or go to www.facebook.com/woofstop, or www.twitter.com/woofstop.