

Friends Fur-ever

Canine Utopia brings healthy pet food to Vancouver

BY RYAN J. PRADO

While it's been said that all dogs go to heaven, these days pampered pooches and frisky felines alike are pawing it to Canine Utopia, a new urban pet store and health food boutique in Vancouver, Wash.

After Evan Smith and his partner Jason Pickering discovered that their dogs Dunkin and Hera were allergic to the foods they'd been eating, the couple sought out alternatives for the itchy canines. The problem was that the Vancouver area didn't have any quality pet food stores to shop in, and crossing the bridge to Portland became a tiresome trek.

"We decided we couldn't be the only people in town that have pets with allergies," Smith explains.

On June 4, Smith and Pickering took the plunge and opened Canine Utopia in Vancouver's revamped Uptown Village. The store carries grain-free, holistic foods, treats, bedding and other healthy pet options. Thus far, Canine Utopia's attention to not only product details, but also its focus on sustaining the local economy, has resulted in steady business since opening just two months ago.

"People are realizing we don't carry the foods produced by the big names," Smith says. "Our dog treats are produced out of Portland, all of our flea and tick medication comes from Vancouver. We source from Eugene, Springfield... Anywhere locally we could get it is where we went first."

Smith and Pickering toured regional dog and cat food manufacturers, as well as toy manufacturers, to ensure they'd be selling top-of-the-line of holistic products.

"We saw them make the food, and I actually watched one of the employees eat it," Smith says. "I realized that if he ate it, then my dog would be fine eating it."

The store does not, however, sell canines. Smith refers those who would like to own a

pet to their local humane shelter. But for folks looking for a safer chew toy alternative, for instance, Canine Utopia carries dog toys made from boiled wool, rather than cotton, so that it can be digested, and save you from a barking big vet bill.

Add in the shop's fancy digs—rebuilt entirely by Smith, that it features over 95 percent recycled store fixtures and that its website is run entirely on wind power, and there's plenty to love about this new addition to Vancouver.

"The best compliment that we've had was people asking if we were a chain," says Smith. "Although I have to tell you, I never picked up a hammer until April."

Canine Utopia is located at 2309 Main St., Vancouver, Wash. For more information, call 360-737-7881 or visit k9utopia.com.

Community Vision

Gay-owned optometry practice celebrates 20 years

BY ERIN ROOK

In a time when many businesses are struggling against an uncertain economy, one gay-owned optometry practice is thriving. Eyes! on Broadway just celebrated 20 years of providing vision care in Northeast Portland, thanks to the support of the gay and lesbian community.

When Tom Barreto, 50, opened Eyes! on Broadway in August 1991, his practice had only



Evan Smith and Jason Pickering sink their teeth into Canine Utopia.

one employee. Today, Barreto employs two optometrists and a staff of 16. What started out as a small community practice is now bursting at the seams, pushing Barreto to raise the bar and consider expanding.

"I started out as a small community office serving the Irvington, Laurelhurst and Alameda areas," Barreto says. But he soon realized people were coming from farther and farther away to visit him. So he adjusted

his mission. "I wanted to be the place to go in Oregon," he explains. "I wanted to be the Nordstrom of opticals, where people went to get good quality eye care and service."

Barreto attributes much of the business's growth to old-fashioned face-to-face networking and the support of the gay and lesbian population.

"We couldn't have made it this far without everybody," Barreto

says. "The gay and lesbian community is so loyal and everyone talks among themselves. We just want to give back to that and thank everybody for that."

But those relationships don't exist by default. Barreto is involved in the community, regularly attending functions and fundraisers for organizations such as Basic Rights Oregon, Equity Foundation and Cascade AIDS Project.

"People tease me that I know so many people in Portland," Barreto says. "But I'm out there. People remember that next time they need their eyes checked."

As a result, his business grew steadily through referrals—so much so, he says, that he had to cut back on advertising for a while and hire more doctors.

Still, Barreto is always looking for ways to provide eye care to more people, whether by expanding his own business or through his yearly trips to developing countries with Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity.

Barreto has volunteered with the organization since 1995, bringing much-needed eye care to places such as Nicaragua, the Philippines and Peru, where it often impacts people's ability to earn a living.

"A lot of people are farsighted, so reading glasses make a huge difference," Barreto says, noting the generosity of Portland patients who donate their old glasses. "A lot of these people are illiterate, they don't really read but they do a lot of handwork, making blankets and crafts to sell at market. ... It's a huge, huge difference for them." ☐

Eyes! on Broadway (2300 NE Broadway) is celebrating its 20th anniversary by giving away weekly prize packages throughout September. To enter, "like" the business on Facebook. For more information, visit eyesonbroadway.com.

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