

New store is for the pet that has everything

Terri Bennett doesn't sell pets at either of her pet supply stores — and that's part of the secret of her success, she said.

Specialty Pet Supplies, which has operated in Plymouth since 1979 and at a Farmington Hills location that just opened in October, is a first in the pet supply industry because it stocks varieties of every imaginable item a pet owner might need.

Bennett's inventory may sound half-made-up, but she's not kidding when she displays chinchilla and monkey food — and it sells. Specialty Pet Supplies also stocks U.S. Coast Guard-approved dog life jackets for the avid canine sailor in the family.

And because no dog wants to stroll the neighborhood out of style, animal lovers can choose from a full line of Duke's Dog Fashions — sweaters and collars for the 1990s. There are even electronic collars to keep barking dogs quiet.

Bennett expects her employees to share her and her customers' love for animals.

"You have to have a sincere interest, own pets and have some related training to work in my stores," she said.

"When I get involved in something, I go 100 percent," she added. "I wanted to do for the pet industry

what's been done in every other retail industry."

To that end, Bennett hired the retail design firm of Jon Greenberg and Associates to design both the Plymouth location and her new store in Farmington Hills.

A REPRESSED pet owner as a child, Bennett's parents prohibited her from owning even a hamster. To that end, Bennett married at age 31, one of her first acts of independence was to buy Brutus, a 120-pound Bouvier showdog. She has been a pet lover ever since and attends pet shows regularly.

Her first foray into the pet supply business began as a hobby in 1975, when she hosted "doggie wear" parties at her home, selling supplies to her friends who also participated in dog shows. In 1979, she opened her first store in Plymouth.

The business immediately started to grow by serving police departments, veterinarians and pet owners. When Bennett realized that true pet lovers own not only dogs but also hamsters, cats, birds and fish, she expanded her inventory to accommodate everyone.

The Plymouth location had sales of \$1.2 million last year, Bennett expects the 4,000-square-foot Farmington Hills location, which cost

\$150,000 to set up and stock, to do at least as well. Specialty Pet Supplies has 18 full-time employees between the two stores.

Bennett said she hopes to expand her operations in 1990 with new stores in Howell and Rochester.

Bennett stocks books and video tapes to keep pet owners up to date on training, feeding and caring for their pets. Tapes are played on video monitors in both stores.

BENNETT SAID success is all about being attuned to the changing trends in pet ownership. This includes pet furniture. In keeping with today's styles, Bennett stocks in mauve, gray and green.

She sells a Yuppie Puppy Machine, which allows a dog to feed himself treats. If pet owners don't mind sharing a bathroom with a cat, they can pick up the Kitty Whiz toilet adapter (the trick is teaching your cat to flush). Bennett even sells an artificial insemination kit, the details of which she is reluctant to discuss.

When Bennett isn't explaining how to feed a chinchilla or operate cat septic tanks, she enjoys sailing and visits friends in St. Thomas and Guadalajara. She keeps busy at home with two Polish Bantam roosters, two airedales, one large and loud



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Terri Bennett, Specialty Pet Supplies owner, with her Airedale terriers Luc and Rosie (in the cart). Standing in the background is employee Danielle Clark. The cart is called a sulky cart.

macaw and seven Japanese Koi fish. She knew she had found a way to satisfy everyone when someone brought in a five-and-a-half foot

monitor lizard and asked to buy a bed for the beloved reptile. He slept soundly that night.

Specialty Pet Supplies, 38507 W.

10 Mile Road between Haggerty and Grand River, Farmington Hills. The Plymouth store is at 1498 S. Sheldon.

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