

Goodies For Good Dogs

4 Paws Barkery treats aim to please canine palates and keep them healthy

By Audra Hoefer

Animal lovers will appreciate the brain-child of West Richland's Tracy Hill and Gail Clark, a duo dedicated to delivering deliciously healthy doggy treats through 4 Paws Barkery.

They recently opened a bakery to provide preservative-free snacks for dogs.

Three years ago, Tracy happened onto an Internet site showing how to start a bakery for dog treats. She ordered a kit and began baking treats for her dogs.

Tracy and Gail, who are neighbors, talked about a partnership and growing it into a full-fledged business.

Tracy created a survey for friends and the partners pulled together six people to assist with a planning session. She also told her friends in the Columbia Basin Dog Training Club, an organization where she trains dogs.

"As this whole business was evolving, it just seemed like a good idea to be a part of," says Gail. "Tracy and I have worked well together in the past."



Gail Clark, left, and Tracy Hill are business partners in 4 Paws Barkery, producing six varieties of dog treats and other goodies for dog owners.

The business is a natural progression for the two animal lovers. The 2-year process brought them to where they are today: offering canine pals throughout the Tri-Cities area and beyond treats such as Sniffer Snaps, Mo'Lassies Wild Oats, Bow WOW Banana Bites, Cheesy

Garlic Growlers, Cammie's Carob Chews and Liver Lips, available in 6½- and 13-ounce bags.

The partners say the products are healthy alternatives to treats packed with preservatives.

"The only difference between Sniffer

Snaps and a molasses cookie is the sugar,” says Tracy.

Tracy and Gail have tweaked recipes in a commercial kitchen to make the best possible combinations of snacks for dogs, minus excess sugar, salt and preservatives.

“Dogs love anything either sweet or tangy,” she says. “They love cheese and garlic.”

Besides the six main products, the entrepreneurs offer an allergy-free line, which includes products such as gluten-free treats that use garbanzo bean flour or brown rice flour.

“Some dogs are allergic to dairy, corn, wheat or eggs,” says Tracy. “We try to do our best to accommodate if people have special requests for their pets.”

4 Paws’ line includes “bountiful bowls,” which Tracy and Gail say are “sure to make tails wag.” They include a variety of treats in nonskid dog bowls with a special surprise—a fun dog toy—in each bag.

Though all products are effective training treats, Liver Lips has become an especially big hit with the canines.

“It involves putting raw liver in a blender and mixing it with garbanzo bean flour, eggs and cheese, then baking it,” says Gail. “The dogs were camping out next to us the entire time. It was a clue that humans were thinking ‘yuck’ and the dogs were thinking ‘we can’t wait!’”

The treats are small and have become popular, with many reorders.

4 Paws products offer additional benefits.

“One of our customers said he liked the way his dog’s teeth looked after eating our treats,” says Gail.

Tracy’s pooches—Cammie, the “senior VP of tasting,” is a 11-year-old Labrador mix; Jake, “director of pawblic relations,” is a 3-year-old husky mix—are the official taste-testers and have approved all treats thus far, say Tracy and Gail.

Besides buying healthy treats for their pups, customers may become official members of “The 4 Paws Pack.” A one-time fee of \$25 makes a dog and its



Tracy and Gail at work on their dog products. Tracy weighs the treats and places them in 13-ounce bags.

owner members for life, and includes the following benefits: a free sample pack of treats, a discount card, a 15-percent discount off the first Treat Bowl order, exclusive e-mail offers and updates, advance invitation to special events hosted by 4 Paws, a membership card for special offers and drawings, a refrigerator magnet, and the dog’s photo and “barkimonial” on the business Web site.

Healthy treats are just the first step of a much larger concept.

“We started where we can manage it,” says Tracy. “We really haven’t done a full

advertising push yet.”

After retiring, Tracy and her husband, A.J. Hill, plan to train foster puppies as Canine Companions for Independence. After training, the dogs are given to people with disabilities to help with everyday tasks.

One of the partners’ goals is to start a foundation and dedicate some proceeds from 4 Paws to support it. The foundation will assist the Canine Companions for Independence, as well as other dog-oriented not-for-profits.

The business partners also are examining ways to combine a home for the Columbia Basin Dog Training Club and 4 Paws as a “doggy destination,” says Tracy.

“I’d eventually like to have a retail front,” she says. “We’re envisioning a place where you can bring your dog in and maybe have coffee. We’d also like to host events where 4 Paws Pack members receive first notice to attend—maybe a Halloween costume contest and a special event—each quarter.

“We’re trying to attract a certain type of dog lover. We didn’t go into this thinking we’d compete with the national brands in the big stores. We wanted to reach a niche market and we’re OK with that.”

Gail says they are both philanthropically minded.

“Healthy treats equals happy dogs,” she says. “We just want to help dogs have better lives. We want to be friends with everybody’s dogs.” ■