

Small Business Close-up

Fleas beware: Mobile business isn't clowning around

By Lucy Lee

Rolling through the streets with its boldly displayed orange logo and broadcasting a catchy tune is Empire City's newest traveling circus, "The Fleaing Circus." This circus is not what you would expect from its bright exterior and cheery jingle. Inside is a fully equipped, professional dog groomer that takes her business very seriously.

"We are making a difference in people's lives by offering a convenient service that keeps both pets and their owners healthy and comfortable," says the 37 year old owner and CGO (Chief Grooming Officer), Jeanie Moran. With over 5 years of grooming experience under her clippers, Moran and her team of groomers have been hitting the road 6 days a week for the past 11 months, arriving at customer's homes and leaving a trail of clean, flea-free pooches in their path.

Just ask Jasmine, the 9 year old Sheltie mix who's prancing up the driveway with Fleaing Circus bows in her thick, soft fur.

"It's worth every penny," declares Jasmine's owner Anna Mitchell, who at six months pregnant, decided to try the service after unsuccessfully trying to bathe Jasmine on her own. "I had no idea this business existed until one of my friends recommended it. It's made grooming a much more comfortable experience for both of

us," says Mitchell accepting a couple of warm licks from an affectionate Jasmine.

Jeanie Moran describes her clientele as ranging from busy professionals, to retired seniors who either don't have a means to bring beloved pets to the groomers, or who are physically unable to wash and trim their pets at home.

"I got the idea from watching my mother struggle to lift her own dog, Charlie, into the car," remembers Moran. "At 11 years old, Charlie hated going to the groomers and Mom was getting too old herself for the whole ordeal. I thought it would be smart for someone to start an outcall service for people with difficulty transporting their pets to get groomed. And here I am today."

Moran is here today and noticeably modest about the success her "little business" has enjoyed since opening last year. Despite some seasonally lower sales in the winter time, business has been booming. She estimates her annual sales for this year will be close to \$200,000. Not too shabby for a company with startup capital estimated at \$50,000 and only four employees.

"We've been very fortunate. The interest in mobile grooming was strong when we launched last year and has been consistently growing ever since our wheels touched the pavement," said Moran, who added her company needed to

launch a second vehicle to the fleet in only three months of operation. "Our vans have been completely booked for the past 6 weeks and we have an average of 10 standing appointments every week," says Moran. "It's gotten to the point where we've started referring some customers to the competition in exchange for a 5% referral fee," she explains.

When asked if she's worried about the competition taking away her business, she smiles saying, "This market is just wide open right now. I'd rather keep our customer's dogs healthy than have them wait several weeks for an appointment. Besides, there aren't many qualified groomers in our area."

The response to a mobile dog grooming service has been well received in Empire City. Jeanie Moran thought a flurry of e-mails from her clients after the first few months was an anomaly, but she's observed many since and the message is always the same, "Thank you."

"I was really surprised at first when our initial customers contacted us with sincere thank you e-mails. I think customers appreciate the personal way we go about our business and the convenience our service offers over the more traditional groomers," explains Moran. No doubt the care Moran displays for both dogs and people has kept customers constantly coming back to "The Fleaing Circus."