



The Feed Bag Pet Supply 2003 – 2013 - ?

In the Fall of 2003, The Feed Bag Pet Supply opened in approximately 3,000 square feet in Manchester Mall, Grafton, WI. Started by Mark Haslam, former Electrical Engineer tired of the rat race, and Connie Roller, experienced in the pet industry, the goal was to create a store like no other.

Not visible from any street, and Village regulations forbidding signage on Wisconsin Ave, we had a challenge on our hands. We were the only pet supply store in Grafton, and one of only 3 in all of Ozaukee County. We had full-service grooming, a self-bathing room (Another first in Ozaukee county), and all positive-reinforcement dog training. How to get the word out about all these great services was a slow, uphill climb.

Our vow from the beginning was to offer the best in nutrition for pets, and that meant shunning some of the biggest pet food names in the industry. Customers walking in our door were each individually educated on the 'new' concept of healthy and grain-free foods. The more bold customers who wished the best for their pets were introduced to the concept of raw/frozen natural diets, previously unheard of in Ozaukee County.

Focusing on education, we taught our customers the idea of actually reading the ingredient list on foods, rather than relying on the splashy promises on the front of the bag. Gradually, as these customers saw real improvement in their pet's health, they told their friends and family about us. As the word spread about this new type of pet store that was clean, bright, sweet-smelling and more interested in your pet's health rather than just taking your money, our customers began to travel from farther and farther distances.

Given our location invisibility, we promoted ourselves with booths at the local fairs (at one point bringing a 180 gallon salt-water fish tank with a live Stingray to the fair.) No idea was too outlandish to try for publicity, because as an independent store, we had no rules to follow but our own.

A couple of years after opening, a competitor opened in the Shopko Plaza. This competitor attempted price-wars, and carried very cheap and low-end products. Additionally, he had the visibility of being in a shopping center near a grocery store. We are eternally grateful for the integrity of our customers who chose to continue to support The Feed Bag. It became obvious very quickly that our customers cared much more about their pets well-being than to shop at a low-end outlet store.

In 2008, the floor literally dropped out beneath us. The landlord gave all tenants an eviction notice so the mall could be razed and a new development built. Because we had two years left on our lease, we filed suit against the landlord for compensation for the remainder of the lease. While the lawsuit was in progress, the mall was quite literally being torn down around us.



We sure had some amazing customers who dodged bulldozers, shopped while the windows shook, the parking lot flooded and construction dust and debris layered all of our cars. On many occasions our water and electricity were cut off and we rang up purchases with an adding machine. With the construction fencing changing the route to our door almost weekly through winding piles of dirt and concrete people who loved us still found us. Some days it seemed like the only way in was by helicopter.

I have to admit, there were many days I went home in tears. Not just the noise and chaos all around us, but the never-ending questions about where we were going, or if we were just going to go out of business began to get depressing. We were trying to find a place to move to, but running out of time fast. We could sense the customer's frustrations about our future, because we felt it ourselves a thousand-fold.

The end result of the lawsuit was only enough for us to pay the attorney fees. Mark pulled more money out of his retirement, and we bought out the remainder of our Shopko Plaza competitor's lease. The space was a complete dump and took weeks and lots of funds that we did not have to spare, to clean and remodel to our standards. We opened in that location on Black Friday, 2008.

With only a year left on that lease, and that landlord unwilling to renew for a 5-year lease, we took on the full-time job of hunting for a new location. Funny enough, all the empty buildings in Grafton that we looked at and made offers on are still empty to this day. Either the building owner did not want a pet store, or zoning laws were a conflict for this business. We made every effort possible to stay local to the community that helped us grow.

We finally found the diamond in the rough, the former Ethan Allen building in Mequon. Dark, dingy and full of artificial little ‘rooms’, the place needed to be completely gutted. Whew, once *again* construction, plumbing, drywall, paint, slat-board, tile, asphalt, lighting, etc. The good news was that this time we had a 13,000 square foot building to work with. Mark spent his days and nights remodeling the new location, while I stayed back in Grafton running the store and beginning the whole moving process again.



And, once again, packing all of the products, dis-assembling racks and shelves, moving it all in freezing-cold weather, assembling and stocking all over again. Moving twice in 13 months was getting old fast.

It was worth it. We opened in this location January 15th, 2010. Our final home is amazing. There is no other business in Wisconsin that provides full-line pet supplies, grooming, training and a dog fitness pool!

Our Grooming Salon schedule is full and growing. Cindy, our Salon Manager has worked hard at hiring and training the best staff available and our customers love the additional choices of walk-ins for nail trims and self-bathing.



Our doggie fitness pool is extremely popular with dogs coming for swims for strength building, weight loss, burning off energy or just learning to swim for the first time. It is fun for us to see that and retrieving in 15 gratifying to hear our parking lot because ‘the fun place’. swims have been the and pains; and are able result are more active



first puppy swim fetching minutes, and even more so ‘regulars’ yelping in the they are so excited to go to Benefitting greatly from senior dogs who have aches to swim pain-free and as a and ‘bouncy’ over the

following days. Because our staff members are actually in the pool and side-by-side with the dogs, some very strong bonds form between our swim dogs and their swim coaches.

Our training classes are busy, and we adore watching the puppies and newly adopted dogs grow in confidence as they learn the basics of how to be a well-mannered dog that is welcome anywhere. Class sizes are limited to 7 dogs, allowing Mark to give each dog plenty of individual practice.

Our Aquatics Department is known for expertise in Saltwater/Corals and freshwater from beginners to experts. We carry not only the basics of fish, but also many of the frags and corals that are difficult to find anywhere else. Tom, Manager of the Aquatics Department has been growing a great staff that can answer questions and offer advice on all aspects of fish care.

We have a growing relationship with local veterinarians who refer their clients to us *because* they realize how hard we work so hard to help improve the health of pets, through diet, exercise and training. Many veterinarians have come to realize that swimming is one of the best forms of exercise for dogs, and we are happy to provide it.

We have started The Fairy Dog-Mother Project, which provides pet food to the clients of The Family Sharing of Ozaukee food pantry. We have donated over 6,000 lbs of dog & cat food that, hopefully, will prevent anyone from having to give up a cherished family member just because that can't afford to feed it during tough times. It is our intent to continue this program indefinitely through donations and fund-raisers.



Above all, our retail has expanded to 9,000 square feet of healthy nutrition, snacks, toys and everything else needed for your pets. We have stayed true to our commitment of providing the best in nutrition. We have 9 freezers full of raw/frozen diets for dogs and cats, in addition to many freeze-dried foods, grain-free foods and high quality canned diets. It is amazing the amount of nagging health issues that can be solved through proper nutrition!

So. The little pet store that wasn't taken too seriously in 2003 is now celebrating our 10 year anniversary in 2013. We have overcome a lot of obstacles, including a sketchy economy. We are now the largest pet store in the county with the reputation for the best knowledge, expertise and ethics.

Please join us in celebrating our anniversary. Whether you are a long time customer or checking us out for the first time, we'd love to see you!

Connie Roller, Manager

