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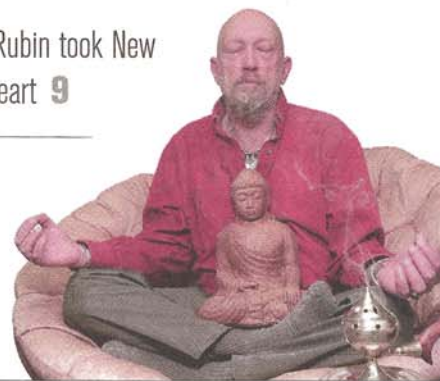
MARCH 26 - APRIL 1, 2010 \$2.00

FACE OF BUSINESS Mitch Rubin took New Mexico's spirituality to his artist's heart **9**

TOO MANY Private colleges in NM? **3**

FIRST EXIT VC-backed Santa Fe firm sold **4**

SBS Delta Fire Gear Maintenance helps firefighters' uniforms take the heat **11**



COURTESY OF PET BUTLER

Matt Boswell, owner of Pet Butler, sees good growth potential in N.M.

Pet Butler hopes to scoop up profits in New Mexico

BY MEGAN KAMERICK | NMBW STAFF

It's a crappy job, but someone has to do it.

And Matt Boswell has made out quite well, thank you. As "chief excrement-officer" of Pet Butler, he led his Dallas-based company to revenue of \$4.4 million. It's not exactly the career path he envisioned, but now he's happier than a pig in — well, you get the idea.

SEE PET 22

22 newmexico.bizjournals.com

PET: Animal lovers spent \$45.5 million in 2009 on pet products and services

FROM PAGE 1

"You have to get rid of your pride and say 'Yes, I scoop dog mess and I am proud to do so,'" Boswell said. "There are 70 million dogs in the U.S. and all of them poop numerous times a day, and no one likes cleaning up after it."

He's also proud that he has helped others find success as franchisees, and now he's looking to help a few more by expanding into New Mexico, specifically Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The way Boswell sees it, Albuquerque is a primo market given its high dog ownership rates and its many working professionals who value their time. Last year, Men's Health magazine ranked the city third in the nation on its list of the best cities for dogs. The rankings were based on ownership rates, as well as the number of dog parks, pet supply stores, animal shelters, boarding and day care facilities, and veterinarians.

Boswell launched Pet Butler in 1998. He began franchising in 2005. He has more than 126 franchises in 28 states and 12,000 clients. That's down from 148 franchises, but Pet Butler is continuing to expand into new markets, he said.

The startup cost for a franchisee is between \$60,000 and \$80,000, which includes buying a truck and tools. If someone has his or her own truck, the costs will be less. The tools are not fancy — aluminum spades and rakes, jumbo dust pans, some special odor eliminator solutions for the yard.

Rather than using fancy poop scoop tools, Pet Butler has invested in its proprietary communications software (called ARF) and its Web-to-mobile routing software (Poop Net). It handles all the phones from Dallas (Poop Central Command), including selling prospective customers who call for information, routing, billing and collections.

It's more support than franchisees typically get, but it was a strategic decision.

"I said 'What do I hate? What keeps me from building my business?' It was obvious: The mundane administrative office junk that gets in the way of serving the customer," Boswell said.

Most franchisees eventually hire "fecal removal technicians" and determine their own rates, but normally one dog per week costs \$11 and each additional dog is \$3.

"We view ourselves first and foremost as a marketing company that scoops poop,"



RANDY SIVER | NMBW

Albuquerque's ranking as one of the best cities for dogs was based on amenities like Enchantment Pet Resort & Spa. The ranking caught the attention of Pet Butler.

he said when asked what the technicians do with the waste. "So when we go into a yard to clean up the waste, we toss it in the neighbor's yard and leave a card."

In reality, they take it with them for disposal in a dedicated dumpster or at the local landfill. Some have forged ties with local recyclers that process cow and horse manure.

Franchisees can make into the six figures, Boswell promises. However, he's quick to add that this takes some time.

"It's not like Starbucks," he said. "It's a subscription service, so once you get a customer, they are usually with you for life. So the residual cash flow is nice, but in the first year, it's not."

Many franchisees take out loans, and Pet Butler is listed as a Small Business Administration preferred franchisee. The company has received more than 10,000 franchise applications to date and has selected 148.

Some assume this is a service for lazy people with more money than sense, Boswell added, but the customers are from all economic levels. The recession has reduced the number of Pet Butler franchisees, he said, but then again, people are often working longer hours these days and time is more constrained.

"We've saved more marriages than Dr. Phil," he quipped.

Pet lovers do appear to be ignoring the recession. They spent \$45.5 billion in 2009 on pet products and services, according to the American Pet Products Association, a 5.4 percent increase over 2008.

One local scooper is skeptical that this market is big enough to absorb another similar service.

Debbie Frazier started Poop Busters 25 years ago. The recession has taken a real bite out of her business, she said. She had more than 400 customers, and now the number is more like 340. Her rates start at \$9 a week for up to two dogs.

"I think he'll have a harder time than he thinks to get going here," she said. "He won't be able to undercut our prices, but I wish him the best and go for it."

Molly Reed is a little more optimistic. She worked for Frazier, then started K9 Scoopers Plus five years ago. She, too, has lost some customers in the recession, but she also sees a continuing demand.

"Albuquerque people love dogs," she said. "A lot of homes have two or three, and I think more people need this service."

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