

Barking for biscuits

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Rachelle Latour's doggie snacks are so good, people have been known to snack on them.

"I've had people come back and say: 'I didn't know they were for dogs'" Latour said, noting they devoured them.

She makes baked gourmet treats that she sells at the Guelph Farmers Market and a growing number of stores, and has received a positive response from customers.

Her small company named Spoil The Dog is the maker of wholesome biscuits, brownies, muffins and pies for dogs, cats and horses.

A teaching assistant by profession, Latour formed the company after deciding she only wanted to feed her mixed-breed dog, Moccacino, the best food.

She began making it herself when Moccacino, now five, was only a puppy.

"I was making them for my own dog, the most natural treats that I could," Latour said.

They were originally whole wheat-based, but Latour found too many dogs were allergic to that, so she switched to chickpea powder instead.

The treats are high in protein, fibre and calcium but low in saturated fat, and contain no salt, sugar, corn, soy, preservatives or additives.

Customer Elayne Starr said her eight-year-old terrier-poodle cross, Kosmo, suffers from food allergies, but has no problem with Latour's treats.

"He loves them. He scratches at the (cupboard) door to get at them," Starr said.

Raised in Sault Ste. Marie, Latour earned a Bachelor's degree in English and French from Laurentian University in Sudbury before working as a teaching assistant in communities from Winnipeg to Montreal for 20 years, most recently settling at John F. Ross collegiate in Guelph.

She was moving around so much, she said, that she never finished teachers' college.

A year ago, she left her job at John F. Ross to pursue Spoil The Dog full time.

"I had to leave because I got too busy," she said.

The doggie treats became popular after she began passing them around to family and friends, she said.

"I started giving treats to people at work for their dogs. Everybody seemed to like them," Latour recalled.

"It wasn't that I wanted to create a business. It was just for fun."

But word spread, and she began receiving in-



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quiries from pet stores that wanted her to begin supplying them.

After checking to make sure the products had a good shelf life, she started selling them initially at a booth in the farmers market. Today, they're also available at 21 stores in Ontario, including Guelph's Stone Store and Fergus's Fountainhead.

"I'm in pet stores, gift shops and health food stores," she said.

Ingredients may include chickpea flour, cinnamon, flax seeds, oats, yogurt and carob powder.

There are treat bags, holiday cookies, biscuits and even a form of ice cream made from yogurt, bananas and peanut butter.

She also makes cakes and muffins, a dried flaked tuna dish for cats, and a concoction for horses made from carrots, apples, barley, molasses and flax.

"I'm making the most nutritious biscuits I can," she said.

She also makes extra treats for special occasions, such as pumpkin pie cookies for Halloween, truffles for Christmas and goodie bags that include gingerbread men and cookies.

And she gets an order about every week to make a birthday cake for a pet.

She makes her treats in a large convection oven at her Guelph home, but has dreams of setting up a modest storefront bakery within a year.

Latour's affection for animals is evident.

"I just love them and I want them to have the best food," she said.

She doesn't think twice about sampling what she makes.

"I wouldn't give my dog anything I wouldn't eat myself," Latour said.

She's at the farmers' market downtown from 7 a.m. to noon Saturdays. She also has a website at spoilthedogbakery.com.

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