



CONTENTS

- 6 **Pink Glove Dance**
FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS
A campaign to spread breast cancer awareness across the healthcare industry has spiraled into a national movement.
- 10 **The Festive Vegan**
RECIPES FOR ALL HOLIDAYS
*Read up on crafting delicious vegan dishes in *Vegan Holiday Kitchen* by Nava Atlas (Sterling Publishing, 2011).*
- 18 **Doggie Daycare**
AN ADVENTURE AT FURRY PAWS
Furry Paws, a doggie daycare and boarding facility, is the labor of love of New York native Lisa Gallea.
- 24 **A Fresh Classic**
THE WORK OF MELISSA WARNER
Interior designer Melissa Warner transforms a traditional San Francisco home into a timeless, yet contemporary oasis for a family.
- 32 **If Sal Did It, We Can Too**
A TRIP ALONG THE ERIE CANAL
A trip along the Erie Canal reveals history and culture in the form of museums, boats, and art.
- 36 **Threads of Tradition**
THE ART OF TEMARI
Embroidered balls, symbolizing friendship and loyalty, are delicately crafted and given as gifts for the New Year, weddings, and other special occasions.
- 44 **Ringside with Carol Polis**
THE FIRST FEMALE BOXING JUDGE
Not initially interested in the sport of boxing, Carol Polis first learned how to score a match from her ex-husband, a boxing referee at the time.



24 THE WORK OF MELISSA WARNER





Doggie Daycare

AN ADVENTURE AT FURRY PAWS

text: ELLIE LAWRENCE | photography: JOHN BOUMA

Furry Paws, a doggie daycare and boarding facility, is the labor of love of New York native Lisa Gallea.



BUSINESS

I ANTICIPATED MY TWO-YEAR-OLD JACK

Russell terrier, Jethro, to be overly animated as we approached Furry Paws, a doggie daycare and boarding facility in the heart of pet-centric Miami. As if his age and breed didn't already foreshadow his dynamic temperament toward social situations, his notorious track record for leaping out of the passenger's side window of my car at the mere sight of a dog park has certainly sealed the fate for every canine gathering pool. With the leash pulled taut and his little legs galloping furiously, this boutique-style daycare was to be met with the same antsy enthusiasm.

We entered into the spacious front room where vibrant plush toys and colorful leashes grounded the airy atmosphere. While Jethro scurried off to sniff out every scent, his snorting nose glued to the ground like a feasting anteater, I gravitated toward the bone-shaped windows to peek at the pooches at play. The handful of four-legged patrons romping around in the adjacent playroom was enough to quell the irrational fears of this overprotective pet parent as I knew immediately that Jethro would be in good hands at Furry Paws.

Furry Paws is the labor of love of Lisa Gallea, the New York native who personally welcomed my terrier into her establishment as if he was her own pet. "You could say I have

been a genuine dog lover from a young age. Growing up in the suburbs of Rochester, having dogs as pets was almost a way of life,” recalls Lisa. “I can still remember my first dog, a sheepdog named Gus. Gus was a gray and white gentle giant—at least he seemed that way to me as I was very little at the time. Gus taught me to love and respect these loyal companions. When I was in second grade, we got Cooper, a golden retriever. As I was a little older when we got Cooper, I was able to better appreciate the beauty and joy these animals possess. Cooper was a wonderful dog and brought a lot of happiness and good memories to my childhood.”

That same genuine love for animals is what brought Lisa to Miami. “After graduating from Syracuse University, I moved out to LA where I assisted in negotiating celebrity commercial and endorsement deals for a large entertainment firm. Although I enjoyed my job very much, it became evident to me over time that it was just a job. My real driving passion was working with animals,” Lisa describes. “Growing up, my father used to always tell me, ‘In life, you need to find what you love to do, and then find a way to be successful at it.’ That wonderful fatherly advice has always stuck with me. So when I found myself at the crossroads of a big life change, those words of wisdom surfaced yet again, and gave me the courage and inspiration to make the leap. I decided to follow my passion, and to this day, I have never looked back in regret.”

Inspired to focus her career around dogs, Lisa returned to her home state for a year to take a job at a very prominent dog daycare and boarding facility. “When I initially made the career change, it was extremely important that I became educated and properly trained to work with dogs,” she explains. “Taking that job was a wonderful hands-on learning tool. The owner of the facility was not only a great business owner, but really understood how to operate a safe and healthy facility. During my time there, I learned a tremendous amount—everything from dog behavior to proper



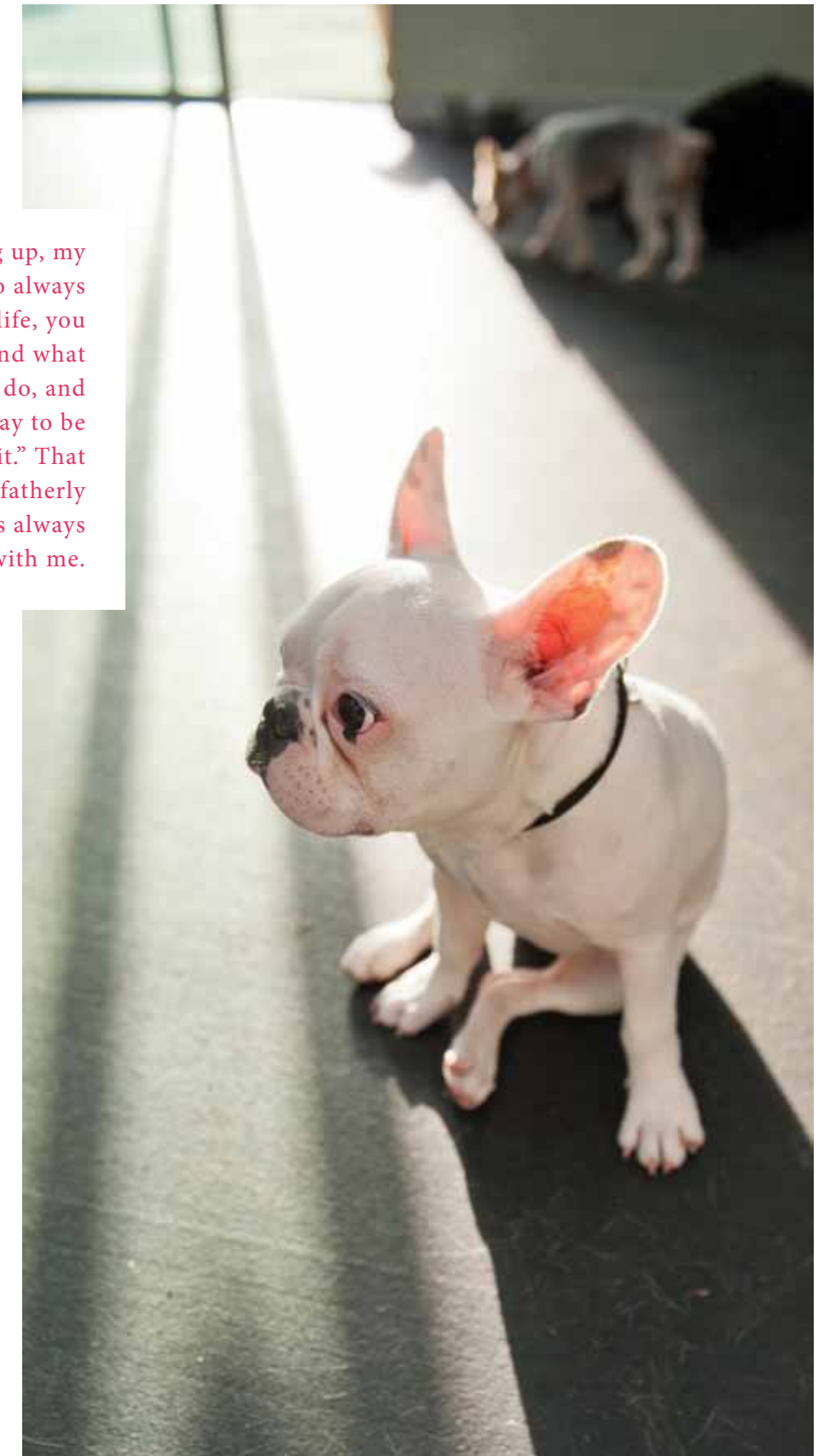
flooring. Additionally, I also received my Advanced Pet Care Technician certification, became certified in Pet CPR, and read *a lot!*”

Once well versed in the industry, Lisa found herself Miami bound, ready to branch out into her own business in the pooch-populated city. “Every business owner I have ever met has always had big hopes and dreams for their business, and I am no exception,” continues the driven and spirited entrepreneur. “I knew from the beginning that I not only wanted to offer an unbeatable

service that was nothing short of the *best* care and attention for the dogs in my care, but I wanted to make a difference in the lives of these dogs. I wanted my facility to be a place where dogs could socialize and get the exercise and stimulation they need in a clean, healthy, and safe environment.”

But before learning to walk as a business owner, she had to crawl. “Opening Furry Paws was a very determined and exciting process for me. As I was new to Miami, I needed to become familiar with the city, understand the

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people, and most importantly make a name for myself,” informs Lisa. “Furry Paws started off as a dog walking and pet sitting business. Every day, I would visit the local dog parks, hand out business cards and flyers, and network any way possible. After about a year and a half, I was finally at a point where I felt comfortable enough to expand the business.”

Furry Paws is now a thriving, multifaceted establishment focusing on daycare, overnight boarding, and basic grooming services. The facility has two generously sized indoor spaces where the bigger dogs can have their own room to run around in all day, while the “little paws” can enjoy their own separate quarters (complete with a playhouse) all to themselves. The large playrooms open up to a 3,000-square-foot “bark park” where canine clients can enjoy an agility ramp, fire hydrant, doggie pool, and even a play slide in the wonderful Florida weather. The turf flooring and six-foot-tall fence surrounding the perimeter of the property ensures that even my escape

artist of a dog will remain safe and secure throughout his stay. “I have learned to never underestimate the capability of a dog,” Lisa comments. “Their determination and intelligence can be very intense!”

Whether the clients are some of Lisa’s regulars who come every day of the week while their owners are at work, those who stop in every now and then for exercise and socialization, or new faces like Jethro who spend the day as a special treat, every dog receives loving attention while at Furry Paws. “As a dog owner myself, I also used to use daycare and boarding facilities, so I understand what a difficult and nerve-racking experience leaving your own dogs can be,” analyzes Lisa, who strives to maintain an inviting and warm establishment. “Creating a personal experience was a real driving force in ensuring that my clients knew me personally, interacted with me on a daily basis, and were always reassured their dogs were going to be in good hands while they were away. Additionally, I am very hands on with the everyday operation. Every single one of my staff members is hired and personally trained by myself to ensure that the best quality of care is always provided.”

As if presenting the best care and attention to the dog-loving community wasn’t enough, Lisa’s passion extends to fostering dogs and promoting animal adoption as well. “From the very beginning, fostering dogs has always been an experience and opportunity I wanted to be involved with. When I learned about Paws 4 You Rescue, a nonprofit rescue organization based out of Miami, Florida, I instantly wanted to help,” she states. “Each person that donates their time and services to Paws 4 You brings something unique and helpful to the table. For me, I was able to foster dogs at my facility which helps to relieve the unfortunate overcrowding that can result from so many dogs in need of homes. Paws 4 You is an incredible organization that battles a tremendous growing problem here in Florida, and I am proud to assist them in any way possible.



canine community. But I was also incredibly grateful for the content Jack Russell, complete with a panting smile stretched ear to ear, that she returned to me at the end of the day. When I inquired about Jethro’s behavioral report card, Lisa assured me today was just another typical day consisting of “tails wagging in and tails wagging out!” The pack of dogs spent the majority of their time getting plenty of fresh air, running through the sprinkler, and racing on the agility ramp—of course, there was a brief afternoon nap thrown in for intermission. As for Jethro’s scoring of Furry Paws, he was clearly more than impressed—the pup was fast asleep the second his head hit the seat, recharging his battery for his next doggie daycare playdate.

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“Fostering dogs can be a very difficult, but rewarding process,” Lisa continues. “I always become very attached to the dogs I foster; it’s hard not to when you become so close day in and day out. Unfortunately, a lot of the dogs that need fostering are dogs with a broken past that were faced with difficult circumstances. You become attached watching the dog open back up and trust again. It’s amazing to watch it all unfold in front of you. But when it’s time to say goodbye, I always remind myself that my purpose in their life has been fulfilled, and they will now get that chance to the wonderful life they deserve. Fostering dogs is more than just giving a dog a temporary place to stay. It’s part of giving a dog a second chance.”

It warmed my heart to know that my patronage at Furry Paws helps enable Lisa to continue following her passion and assisting the