

Tomorrow's Tycoons

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Monday, March 26, 2007; Page B01 Casey Reichl

Age: 18

Gourmet Dog Treats

Casey Reichl got her start baking people food but is hoping to make her fortune baking for dogs.

The 18-year-old senior at Marshall High School in Falls Church is confident that people willing to shell out \$225 for a doggie trench coat from Burberry will be more than happy to drop a few extra bucks for her gourmet dog treats.

Early this year, she launched Casey's Canine Cuisine. Corporate headquarters is the Vienna home she shares with her parents, sister, brother, three dogs, five birds and rabbit. Once, sometimes twice, a week -- depending on her lacrosse schedule -- Casey commandeers the family kitchen. Using mother Diane's KitchenAid mixer, she creates savory batches of garlic treats, Chicken Lickers, Beef Barkers and Snickerpoodles. She hand-cuts and frosts each biscuit.

On this rainy March day, two of her taste testers -- Cooper and Tyson -- were weaving between her legs and nudging her hip with their wet noses in search of samples.

"I don't know how they know what I'm doing," she said as she grabbed a couple of biscuits off the rack and tossed them to the dogs.

Casey said she did "a ton of research" before launching her gourmet canine biscuit line. She scoured the Internet and cruised the aisles of PetSmart. Sure, the store sells biscuits, but they weren't very imaginative.

"The dog business is getting so popular," she said. "Even Gucci makes things for dogs."

According to a survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturing Association, people in the United States spent \$34.4 billion on their pets in 2004. The bulk of that -- \$14.2 billion -- was spent on food.

Casey tried to make her treats distinctive by offering one variety few companies seem to offer: biscuits for the dentally challenged.

Her Snickerpoodles are designed for older dogs with, ahem, dental problems. Her inspiration was her dog Pulu, who had gingivitis as a puppy and as a result had nine teeth removed. Because the future isn't looking particularly bright for the bichon frise's remaining choppers, Casey needed to come up with a solution.

Snickerpoodles are soft biscuits that look a great deal like real snickerdoodle cookies (and even have some of the same ingredients, such as cinnamon). The resemblance is so striking that she fed some to her brother's unsuspecting friends. ("They ate them. They just said they tasted a little strange.")

Last week, she scored one of her first major marketing coups when Black Eyed Susan, a gift shop not far from her home, agreed to stock her gourmet biscuits. A Web site is on the horizon.

"It's something I love to do, so I figured, why not do it all the time?"

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