

Franchise Times®

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Tricks of the Trade

Dogs bored with agility training can always switch their class schedule and take the Therapy Dog Class to help children become better readers. Or a scent-training class so they can sniff out mom's lost cell phone or dad's misplaced remote control.

Helpful dogs—and really what dog doesn't want to please its master—can learn to clean up their toys and to pick up dirty laundry and place it in the hamper. But don't expect them to sort it, they're color-blind.

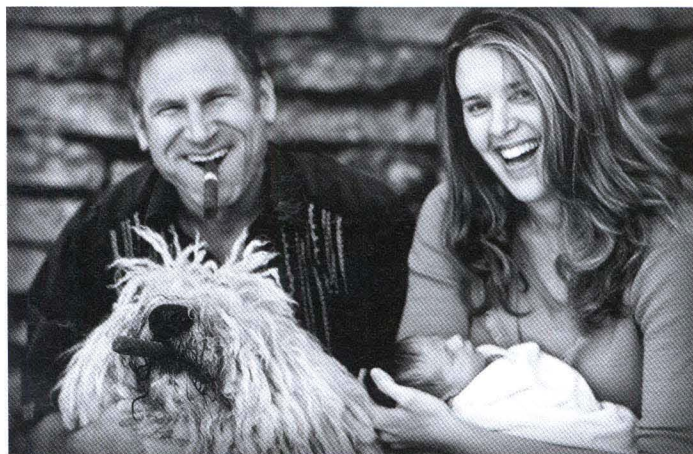
Zoom Room is not a franchise for lazy dogs or people who think their dogs are, well, dogs. It's for people who see nothing odd about attending a singles-only event to meet other singles as their four-legged wingmen chase the laser-light show on the floor.

Jaime Van Wye came up with the idea for the dog-training franchise when she discovered doggy day care was not her cup of kibble. "I ran it for four years," she says about her luxury boarding facility in Los Angeles. "I had been a dog trainer and the assumption is that you get to hang out with dogs." Not true. Instead, she found herself managing a large staff and liabilities. And even when Tom Cruise's and Kelly Clarkson's dogs were guests, it was the stars' assistants, not the stars themselves, that came out.

Van Wye made a list of what she liked about her business and what she disliked. The end result was a business where she could interact with both the dogs and the owners—having the owners around lessened the fear of liability. As the daughter of L.A. Lakers-great Gail Goodrich, Van Wye understood competitive sports. She had coached the rowing team at UCLA and was a dog trainer. The combination play: "We coach people to train the dogs," she states. The dogs maneuvering the agility course aren't the only ones getting exercise. "We sponsored a study to see how athletic it (agility training) was, and it was really good exercise" for humans, too, she says. Franchisees form leagues, similar to youth soccer leagues, where people and their dogs can compete and practice.

To keep dog-lovers engaged, she came up with singles Disco nights, plus canine birthday parties. Her skills in training drug- and bomb-sniffing dogs became a class for dogs whose noses are better than their agility—a sort of aromatherapy.

Altruistic dogs can become therapy dogs



Jaime Van Wye with her husband, baby and Clyde Orange, the dog that makes Zoom Room smokin' hot right now.

through the H.A.B.I.T. Ruff Reading program which teams up a child who is struggling to read with a cuddly, non-judgmental friend to read out loud to.

Franchisees pay a \$35,000 franchise fee, 9 percent royalty (including ad fee), and commit to an eight-to-12-week online training program and an internship at their local Humane Society, before coming to Los Angeles for their formal in-person training.

New Franchisee Michele Mendoza and her husband had talked about getting involved in a business for dogs for years. "There's only so many dogs you can rescue," she says. She believes training dogs to live with humans will decrease the number that show up at shelters. She opened her franchise in Austin, Texas, in July.

Franchisees may also want to take a page from the owner's book and get a Komondor, like Van Wye's Clyde Orange. The unique-looking dog, which appears to be a walking mop of dreadlocks, never fails to attract attention. A short walk down the block can take three-times as long to answer all the questions about Clyde, she says, laughing.

Riding a skateboard, by the way, is Zoom Room's most popular trick. But here's the most endearing: Your dog brings you a tissue when you sneeze. Now if you could just teach him to also say, "Bless You."

