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Loudoun pet care company sniffing out new turf as franchise business takes off

By Sara Gilgore | November 1, 2019



Amy Reed and Leslie Barron want a bigger pack of pups to pamper.

A year and a half after turning their homegrown pet care company into a franchise business, the Woofie's LLC co-founders are adding more locations, eyeing new markets and launching a groomer training school — because after 15 years in Loudoun County, it's time to expand.

The former neighbors turned business partners are interviewing and bringing on more prospective Woofie's franchisees and have three franchise locations up and running: Reston and Leesburg, which opened in April, and the newest in Aldie, which opened in October. They're now starting to grow their own customer bases out of the company's nucleus in Ashburn, where Woofie's has been running a hyperlocal pet-sitting, dog-walking and mobile-grooming service since 2004.

"You have to have that true passion for animals; this business doesn't work if you don't have it," Reed said. "But that's not enough. It is a business, and it is not something that you do out of pure passion — you need to have the experience of building a team, managing a team, managing your external customers, but also your internal customers, which I consider your pet sitters, groomers and back-office people."

Reed and Barron pivoted to the franchise model in the spring of 2018 and raised $150,000 to create the franchise company, Woofie's Pet Ventures LLC. Reed now runs that five-person engine, while Barron focuses on the original company-owned Woofie's business. About 30 employees work out of the corporate office in Ashburn, and the team working directly with the dogs comprises dozens more.

The co-founders are sticking to their plan of "keeping the first few close to home," Reed said. But they're exploring more opportunities both around the D.C.-metro area beyond. That's the focus for the next year or so, Reed said. They've been talking with potential franchisees in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and other parts of Virginia beyond Greater Washington, such as Charlottesville.

"You have to be really careful not to overextend, especially with us as a young franchisor," she said. "We want to be really careful about that in the beginning."

The company also pressed the play button this month on Woofie's Academy, a training and certification program for its groomers in partnership with the Michigan-based Paragon School of Pet Grooming's online learning program. The business needed a standardized curriculum to teach grooming techniques and best practices, Reed said, but it's also building in elements unique to Woofie's model, such as working in a mobile environment.

The franchise strategy brings a new revenue stream and a mechanism to set up shop in new markets. A franchisee should expect to invest between $118,992 and $190,786, which includes a one-time fee of $38,500.

Franchisees will pay both a 6.5% royalty fee and a 1% brand marketing fee twice a month. The gig requires a minimum net worth of $350,000 to $400,000.

Looking ahead, Woofie's is also focusing on its back-end system to make sure its scheduling software, communication system and policies are in place for its employees, Reed said. "Technology changes, the industry changes, the competitive landscape changes. We want to make sure that our Ashburn office is always one step ahead," she said.

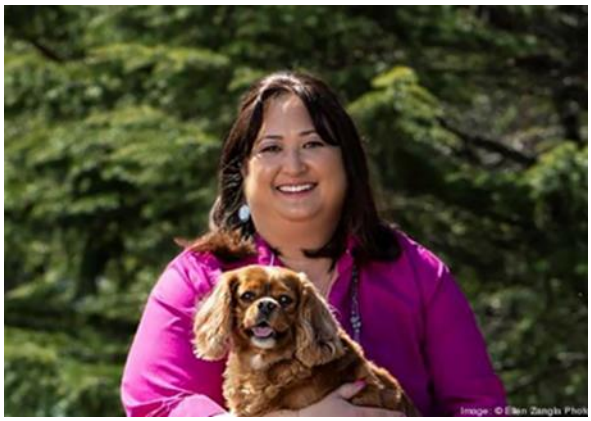
See below for more about the franchisees.

KATHERINE BHAT
Leesburg



- **Opened:** April 2019
- **Run by:** Katherine Bhat, had a prior career in human resources.
- **Why they're doing it:** "When I found out that Woofie's had launched its franchise opportunity, I knew it was the perfect opportunity and wanted to get involved. I'm so excited to bring these amazing services to our hometown of Leesburg."

TANYA LEE
Reston and Herndon



- **Opened:** April 2019
- **Run by:** Tanya Lee, pictured above. She has a background in information technology and finance, and wanted to own a pet business.
- **Why she's doing it:** "I realized that if I was going to pursue this dream, now is the time," Lee said in a statement. "I started looking at franchises because it allowed for enough autonomy and creativity as a business owner, yet it followed a formula and methods that are proven to be effective."

TEFERI DEJENE & SEBAOT GEBRE
Aldie and South Riding



- **Opened:** October 2019
- **Run by:** Couple Teferi Dejene and Sebaot Gebre, pictured above with their kids. They've both transitioned out of corporate careers and have been Woofie's customers themselves for a decade.
- **Why they're doing it:** "After I left my job, I spent about six months looking for another corporate job, however none of the jobs I interviewed for were the right fit so I was on the lookout for an opportunity to try something on our own," Dejene said in a statement. "My wife and I have been Woofie's customers for over 10 years and loved their services, so when we heard they began franchising we jumped at the opportunity."