

JOY PET PRODUCTS

FIDO Friendly sits down with the owners of Joy Pet Products.



Q: What made you start your business?

I never intended to start another business. I was just solving a problem for my four dogs. I had four Yorkies ranging from 10 pounds to just 3 1/2 pounds, and nothing really kept them warm, fit them very well or allowed them to move comfortably. All the coats I tried made them look like kids in snowsuits—they couldn't move, [the coats] didn't stay on or didn't offer much warmth. I thought about using goose down fill one day and made the first Goose Down Filled Doggie Coats™. The coats made such a difference in their comfort, and people asked about the coats everywhere we went. I finally realized the coats could make a real difference for a lot of dogs.

Q: How did you come up with the name?

Animals bring us such joy and are so loving and trusting that Joy in the name felt right. One of my Yorkies who was more Terrier than Toy was named Joy as well. I want everything we offer in our line to bring joy to pets and their people.

Q: What type, if any, research did you do in assessing the consumer market?

One of our original larger-breed dog models had a health issue preventing her from walking comfortably in cooler weather. I sent all the models coats and her "mom" cried when she called to thank me. Maggie could go outside and walk again in cooler weather. The coat isn't a medical device, obviously, but it provides warmth without weight and that can make a huge difference in the animal's comfort. I'd recruited fit models in all sizes because I wanted to offer items for all dogs, not just small breeds. I learned through the fit models that there were dogs in all size categories who, for different reasons, need the protection from the cold that the coats offer. We get lots of calls and emails from customers telling us what a difference the coats have made for their dogs. We love hearing about the dogs, and we're grateful for every photo, call and e-mail.

I did a lot of research on the down fill, fabrics and manufacturers. There are many different qualities of down fill. We don't use any feather or down blends or lesser-quality fill because better-quality, higher fill power lasts longer, is lighter and insulates better. Our down is cleaned properly and far more than the industry standard. Our coats are made in Canada alongside high-end people coats, and

our other items without down fill are all made here in the U.S.

Q: Tell us about your product, how long did it take to get ready for sales?

It took several years to get the initial patterns exactly right and another year or so to be granted two U.S. patents. We introduced a new, all-nylon style of our Goose Down Filled Doggie Coats™ with a removable hood last winter, and it took us a year to perfect those patterns and at least a year to get the Perfect Fit Embroidered Hoodies™ ready, too. We create our own patterns, and it takes time and revisions to get a great fit for all sizes. Our designs have to work for all sizes and they have to be comfortable. It takes time and a lot of attention to detail to provide great function *and* great style.

Q: What were your biggest hurdles in marketing Joy Pet Products?

The biggest hurdle is making people aware of our company. There are items at all price points with all sorts of designer names on them, and that can be confusing to consumers. We don't do much advertising, so many retail and business consumers don't yet know about us. Once people have one of our Goose Down Filled Doggie Coats™ in hand, they understand and appreciate the design and quality. Customers compliment us over and over (and we never tire of it) about our quality and style. We are very grateful to our customers for telling others about us.

Q: Is there anything you would have done differently?

When people asked so many times about the coats I initially made for my own dogs, I should have realized sooner how much potential they had.

Q: What is on the horizon for Joy Pet Products?

We have several wonderful new items in the works. We've also started a "Joy—spread it around" campaign. We've always donated to animal charities and to extend that effort further, I've designed one of our Perfect Fit Hoodies™ in our signature turquoise. Profits from that limited-edition hoodie will be donated to animal charities in need of help. The hoodie is available in sizes to fit most breeds, and when given as a gift you'll also be giving a gift to charity. **ff**

"WARMTH WITHOUT WEIGHT (MAKES) A HUGE DIFFERENCE IN THE ANIMAL'S COMFORT"