

Scooby Snacks:

Dog food bakery offers treats to tempt any pet

By: ERIN MYERS, Villager staff
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Above, Jay Kirsch adds the finishing touches to a snowman dog cookie. The icing is made of colored yogurt.
Photo by Erin Myers

Meticulously iced cookies, gooey brownies and bite-sized cupcakes are all being baked up fresh in a new area bakery.

Don't expect to find a grain of sugar or an ounce of chocolate in the kitchen, however. These treats are baked exclusively for dogs.

Owners Jay Kirsch and Frank Ciaccio sold the gourmet treats for months at the Market Street Farmer's Market every Saturday before determining area residents wanted the products to be available year round, and all week.

"The people here enjoy higher-end type merchandise. (Gourmet dog treats) really are a luxury item, but if we love our pets, they deserve that luxury. If we live luxuriously, we want our pets to live that way too," Kirsch said.

Kirsch and Ciaccio take great pains to make their specialized bakery mirror a traditional bakery as much as possible. Bare hands don't touch food items once they are baked and decorated, and all baked goods are fit for human consumption, even if the taste might be lacking.

"There are no processed sugars or preservatives. All of the recipes are veterinarian approved. We work with a veterinarian dermatologist on hypoallergenic wheat-free and corn-free recipes," Kirsch said.

"Icing" is made from colored yogurt and "chocolate" is made of carob.

The necessity for a hypoallergenic treat for dogs stemmed from Ciaccio and Kirsch's own English Bulldog Maggie, who has several food allergies. Many of the baked goods are vegetarian, a necessity for Maggie.

While the taste may leave a bit to be desired for humans, Kirsch said emphasis on texture must be considered in concocting the perfect doggie treat.

"The crunch is just as important as the taste," he said. "It's just a special, fun treat for your dog when they do something good."

Neither Kirsch nor Ciaccio have a culinary background, but Kirsch said being Italian qualifies both of them as relatively good cooks. The rest of their formula was perfected through trial and error at their original store in Alexandria, Va. The store, opened in 2003, was sold in 2004 when Kirsch and Ciaccio moved to Texas. The Virginia store still operates today as Barkley Square.

Barker Street Gourmet also carries pet essentials such as carriers, leashes, collars, toys and bowls as well as some luxury items such as apparel, jewelry and beds.

The work of local vendors and artists also are featured prominently at Barkley Street. Handcrafted wrought iron pet beds from Boyd Land and Barbara Price of Fido Sleeper of The Woodlands, dog breed trailer hitch covers from Shenandoah-based Hard Hat Covers, hand-made cedar beds from Alan Bowser of Conroe and canvas paintings from Diane McMicken in The Woodlands line the shelves along side products from Dallas and Austin. Even lovers of the canine's arch nemesis, the cat, can find treats, toys, beds, clothes and home decorating items among Barker Street's shelves.

With so many tasty treats and designer outfits, a dog's owner is hardly expected to make the choice on their own. Dogs of all shapes and sizes are always welcome in the store with their owner, Kirsch said.

Just be sure to pet Maggie on the way out.

Barker Street Gourmet is located at 442 Sawdust Road at the intersection of Budde Road and Sawdust Road behind the Verizon Wireless store. For more information call (281) 465-1703.

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