

For the love of Buppy



PHOTOS BY RICHARD W. DIONNE JR.

Lauren Ruggiero has several nutritious recipes for dogs, and she is planning a line of products for cats soon.

East Providence native creating dog treats that are healthy and delicious — no matter your species

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If you are a “dog person,” you get it. And if you are not a dog person, you almost certainly have a close friend or family member who is — who refers to their dog as their “fur baby” and treasures them as a member of the family.

In barely more than a generation, the American family dog has moved from the backyard doghouse to the master suite. Economic and social science studies bear this out: in 2015, Americans spent more than \$60 billion on their pets — nearly \$2000 per year for dogs, a little less for cats. Two recent studies, one by Northeastern University and another by a UK medical research charity, confirmed it: people have more empathy and compassion for dogs than they have for other people.

None of this would come as any surprise to Lauren Ruggiero. Concerned about the nutrition in the food she and her husband were feeding their 11-year-old dog, she started to experiment with making dog treats at home. With the help of her brother, a chef, she refined a handful of recipes, which she has been producing at Home & Main, Warren’s food business incubator, since July 2016. She clocks in about three



Each line of dog treats uses only four ingredients, rolled with oats.

times a month, producing 1,200-2,400 treats per session.

“Dogs have a lot of the same allergies and sensitivities we do,” said Lauren. “I’ve never had the attitude that our pets are ‘just’ animals and should eat whatever.”

Lauren’s company, Buppy Pets, gets its name from the nickname she gave her dog when he was just a “baby puppy” — and fittingly, she first looked to baby food for inspiration and as a pure and natural ingredient, though the recipes have since

evolved. Each uses only 4 ingredients, all with rolled oats as the foundation. Pumpkin Nutters also have pumpkin, peanut butter, and cinnamon; Banana Snaps have bananas, apple sauce, and cinnamon; Pizza Bites are made with tomato juice, parmesan, and oregano, and Chick Ched Marys are made with chicken broth, cheddar, and rosemary. And of course, there are no artificial ingredients to be found.

Lauren is certified in safe food preparation and handling, and she follows the

same procedures she would if she were preparing food for human consumption. “I’ve never treated it any differently,” she said.

A former communications executive who was educated at Fatima High School and studied communications and journalism at URI, Lauren’s media and branding expertise makes that part of launching a new food business relatively easy, allowing her to focus on the growth of her product. Cat treats are next, and Lauren is currently running “focus groups” to see what might appeal to her finicky, furry clients.

“I’m excited about what’s next, and finding new ways to help enhance our pets’ quality of life,” she said. “They are an expansion of our family, and they should have the same quality food we would eat ourselves.”

So, if Buppy Pets is making wholesome pet treats, using quality ingredients and preparing them to exacting health standards, can’t we humans have a few? Absolutely, said Lauren.

“I eat them all the time!” You can find Lauren at Hope and Main’s Meet Your Maker markets; Avenue N in Rumford and Deleka’s in Warren sell Buppy Pets products at retail.