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Grooming boom: The Pet Salon provides services, instruction

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By Linda Wilson Fuoco, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Bob Donaldson/Post-Gazette

Karen Silla grooms Duncan, a 7-year-old Bichon-Poodle mix, at The Pet Salon in Scott. She will be the instructor for the Golden Paws Pet Styling Academy and will teach people to be professional groomers.

On a recent day at The Pet Salon in Scott, dogs of varying shapes and sizes stood quietly on grooming tables as they were combed, brushed, clipped, trimmed with scissors and fluffed with blow dryers.

All were patient and calm, wagging their tails as they were also petted and caressed by groomers who spoke to the canines in soothing tones.

The canine customers included an Airedale terrier, cocker spaniel, golden retriever, shih tzu and bichon frise. Each breed has a special, unique style and a good professional groomer knows the cut that owners expect to see at the end of the grooming session.

In fact, there are as many as 200 designs for specific breeds or mixed breeds, not to mention different techniques for bathing and grooming the wide variety of dog hair or fur that may be wiry or silky, straight or curly, long or short.

And then there are cats. They need baths and grooming sessions, too.

Specialized training is required for groomers. Michael Lisk, who has owned the Salon for 10 years, is now expanding into teaching others. Good professional groomers can make as much as \$50,000 a year, though figures from the federal government put the average wage at \$10.38 an hour, he said.

The Golden Paws Pet Styling Academy is at 2101 Greentree Road, Scott, the same location as the salon.

Karen Silla, of Elliot, who has groomed at The Pet Salon for 10 years, will be the course instructor. The course is eight weeks and three days, approximately 35 hours per week. Tuition is \$5,805, which includes a \$765 tool kit.

What does it take to be a good groomer? Loving dogs and cats is a start, Ms. Silla said, but you also "have to have confidence in yourself" and you can't be afraid of animals that might struggle, squirm or snap.

"We stress safety" during the training, she said. That's safety for the animals and safety for the groomers.

Students practice on model animals, which are actually plush toys. They learn how to handle and control animals so that bathers and groomers are not bitten, and dogs and cats are not nicked with scissors or clippers.

Patience and stamina are two traits that groomers need.

"You're on your feet all day, and you're bending and lifting," Ms. Silla said. "Strong hands" are also needed, not only for clipping and scissoring but also for combing, brushing and de-tangling.

According to petgroomer.com, pet grooming jobs will increase by 20 percent in the next decade, Mr. Lisk said. "On any given day, there are 5,000 job opening for groomers in the United States. Many of these go unfilled because of a shortage of trained groomers."

One cat and 15 dogs were scheduled for grooming sessions on a recent day at The Pet Salon. That was a pretty typical mid-week day, Ms. Silla said.

As is the policy at most grooming salons, owners aren't permitted in the grooming area while their pets are being bathed and groomed. That's because dogs and cats are generally calmer, quieter and better-behaved when owners are not standing nearby, Mr. Lisk and Ms. Silla explained.

But the dogs strutted, wagged tails and appeared very happy to be reunited with owners at the end of the grooming session.

Dog coming into the shop also seemed happy to be greeted by employees who took them back to the grooming area, which should be reassuring to owners, employees noted.

For more information e-mail petsalonusa@comcast.net or call Mr. Lisk at 412-279-5331.

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