



Rescuing racers

LEADS TO TRENDY DOG BOWLS — by Dottie Barnes

Watching greyhounds race around a track while on vacation in Florida left a lasting imprint in Dave Poortvliet's mind. "I was 12 the first time my parents took me to the track, and I was just enamored by what I saw," said Poortvliet, Grand Valley's Web manager. "They are beautiful dogs that can run up to 45 mph."

Poortvliet knew then that someday he would own one, or maybe two, of the tall, lean dogs. In 1998, after completing a bachelor's degree in communications at Grand Valley, Poortvliet got a place of his own and rescued his first greyhound. He found the dog through Renewed Life for Greyhounds in Holland. The organization's volunteers travel to bigger racetracks in Florida, Texas and Wisconsin to rescue dogs.

"The greyhounds are not treated very well at these big tracks. They are only given a few races to prove themselves," Poortvliet explained. "If they don't perform well after three or four races, they are killed."

Poortvliet's first greyhound was nearly 2 years old when he adopted her, making Poortvliet the owner of a dog named Cat. "Cat was her racing name,"

he said, laughing. "Usually the dogs are a bit older when they're rescued because they don't start racing until they are a year old. But Cat was a terrible racer from the start; she only raced three times. She was more interested in playing with the other dogs than chasing anything." Several months later, Cat got some company when Poortvliet rescued Chase, a male greyhound.

Poortvliet began working at Grand Valley in 2002 as a Web developer and was named manager in 2003. At that time, he and his wife, Andrea, were remodeling their home in Jenison. "We were updating and redecorating to make things look more modern and contemporary, and we noticed our dog dishes were ugly and didn't match anything," said Poortvliet. "Plus, we never liked the fact that Cat and Chase had to bend all the way down to eat out of the dishes or drink water. They looked so uncomfortable. That's when we got online to see about buying raised dog dishes."

The couple found that the only raised dishes available weren't high enough for their big dogs, plus, they didn't think any of the feeders looked stylish. "We were surprised by what

little was available and how ugly the dishes were,” he said. “My dad’s career was in product design, so I called him and asked him if he could design raised dog dishes that could be offered at different heights, and that would fit different home decors.”

His dad, Bob Poortvliet, designed and built what would become the Trendy Pet Feeder. “It looked so nice in our house and Cat and Chase didn’t have to bend down for their food anymore,” Poortvliet said. “And, every time we had people over — every time — someone would comment on the dog feeder. So, we decided to market them.”

Poortvliet used his skills as a Web designer to create www.trendypet.com. Within a few

months, they were receiving about one order a week. Poortvliet and his dad would build each dog feeder, which took about an hour, and ship the orders themselves. Orders grew steadily and in 2005 it was time to look into using a local distributor. “We found a local manufacturer that is as picky as we are about the product,” said Poortvliet. “For a while, my dad still inspected each order before it was shipped. Now, he handles custom orders and is concentrating on designing new products.”

The Trendy Pet Feeder has received local media coverage and was featured twice on the TV show “Extreme Home Makeover.” Poortvliet said most

of their business continues to come from people visiting their Web site, but they also service high-end boutiques in California and New York.

The feeders are now offered for both dogs and cats and range in price from \$35-\$200. The Web site helps customers determine the right size height of the feeder. “The best way to figure out the proper height is to know your dog’s wither height: the distance from the ground to the top of its front shoulder,” explained Poortvliet. “Subtract six inches from the wither height and that would be the correct feeder height for your dog.”

Poortvliet said raised feeders can improve an animal’s

digestion while relieving stress on their joints. In 2007, Cat, the dog who inspired the idea of Trendy Pet, died of bone cancer; Chase died in early 2009. Poortvliet now owns Neeko, a 7-year-old greyhound. “Neeko is like any other greyhound, she’s very kind and docile, not high-strung. But like other dogs of her breed, she needs to tear around like crazy for five or 10 minutes each day and then is ready to nap. Greyhounds are often called ‘the fastest couch potatoes.’”

Poortvliet said he and his dad are now looking to design and market modern-looking dog beds.



photos by Amanda Pitts

On page 38, Dave Poortvliet, pictured with his dog Neeko, created a Web site to market raised dog dishes. Poortvliet’s dad, Bob, (above) designed the raised dishes for larger breeds like Neeko, a greyhound rescued by Poortvliet.