

Posh doggie treat business is Gulf Coast bound

Look out Gulf Coast dog lovers and entrepreneurs: A taste of the swanky lifestyle for canines that is more prevalent on Florida's East Coast is coming this way.

Woof Gang Bakery, a Palm Beach Gardens-based gourmet dog treat franchise operation with stores in locations such as Jupiter and Key Biscayne, plans to open more than a dozen new stores on the Gulf Coast. The company is targeting markets in Hillsborough, Pinellas, Sarasota, Lee and Collier counties.

The company, which is actively seeking franchise owners for its Gulf Coast locations, bills itself as the industry leader for "superior pet necessities as well as stylish accessories, all competitively priced." Far be it for Coffee Talk to judge whether organic doggie treats and disincen-tive doggie spa products — a pair of Woof Gang staples — count as "necessities."

Nonetheless, there could be some serious bark on the business end of Woof Gang. For starters, the pet industry is a growing billion-dollar landscape and pet lovers are a passionate bunch, regardless of the state of the economy. Indeed, the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association reports there are 71 million households in the U.S. that own at least one pet and industry spending surpassed \$40 billion last year.

Woof Gang is even throwing out some bones to would be franchisees. On the back end, it's offering 100% financing to qualified applicants. And on the front end, the company aims to keep overhead low. Woof Gang stores are small, typically from 700 to 1,500 square feet, and the employee base, including the owner, is usually no higher than three people per store.

