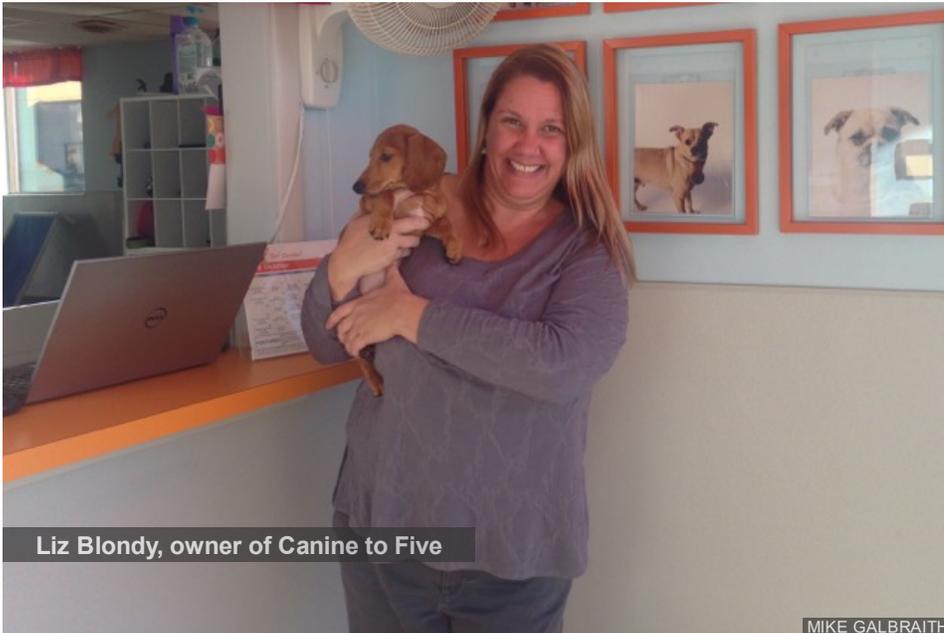


Startup News

How Canine to Five's Liz Blondy grew her dog daycare business from city to suburb

MJ GALBRAITH | TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 01, 2016



Liz Blondy, owner of Canine to Five

MIKE GALBRAITH

Liz Blondy has gone from zero to 250 dogs in eleven years' time.

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Owner of the [Canine to Five](#) dog daycare, boarding, and grooming company, Blondy has shepherded the business through a slow start on Cass Avenue in Detroit into a thriving company. She purchased a nearby pet grooming business, grew the Detroit location, and expanded with a second location in Ferndale. She's now ramping up for a 8,500 sq. ft. addition to the original Detroit facility.

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And she now has two dogs of her own.

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It all started over a couple of drinks with friends. With no plans to start a business of her own, Blondy was content with her job as a business-to-business sales rep. But she had met some friends at a bar in downtown Detroit in 2003 and eventually learned that her friends dropped their dog off at a daycare facility in Farmington Hills every morning, a considerable distance from their homes in Detroit.

Intrigued, Blondy went home and declared that she would open a facility in the city. After visiting a company in Canada and writing a business plan in November 2003, Canine to Five Detroit opened at 3443 Cass Ave. in May 2005.

"Fortunately, Canine to Five Detroit grew really, really slowly," says Blondy.

Having never owned a business or managed a pack of 100 dogs, Blondy is grateful for the slow start. Two dogs showed up the first day she opened, and she'd average about nine a day the rest of the year. In the second year, Blondy cared for about 18 a day. In the third year, Canine to Five averaged about 30 dogs a day.

Blondy used that time to learn how to run a business; how to order office supplies, how to break up a dog fight, and how to manage a staff. Since Canine to Five is open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, Blondy spent most of her time there those first few years, often sleeping and doing laundry at the building.

It took Canine to Five Detroit seven years to average 70 dogs a day. In contrast, it only took ten months to average

70 dogs a day in Ferndale. The Ferndale location was such an immediate success, in fact, that Blondy was already planning to move to a bigger facility within a year of opening in 2013. She left her lease at the 5,700 sq. ft. building on Hilton Road and purchased the 22,000 sq. ft. facility Canine to Five Ferndale now calls home at 1221 E. Nine Mile Rd.

"When I opened Canine to Five Ferndale, for the first six months, I was very hands-on there, too. But I quickly realized that I couldn't be spending 60 hours a week at Ferndale and still grow both businesses and serve as the COO of Detroit still," says Blondy. "Having good managers and a good supervisory team at both places has been really essential."

Blondy recommends taking existing employees to help open a new location. It's something that will help you grow, she says, stabilizing the expansion.

Having two locations has allowed Blondy to take lessons learned from each and apply them to the other. The slow start in Detroit gave her the time to find out how to run a business. And she says she's learned a lot from the Ferndale relocation, so she's now better prepared for the future Detroit expansion. The two Canine to Five locations now employ approximately 60 full-time and part-time workers that care for about 250 to 270 dogs a day.

Blondy has also learned that a business with a Detroit location and a suburban location are two different beasts. Each city has its own personality, wants, and needs. It's important not to treat the multiple locations with a one-size-fits-all approach.

There is one thing, however, that needs to be the same.

"Both businesses can have very different personalities, but exceptional customer service has to be the constant between the two," says Blondy. "I'm not gonna try and have everything be super cookie-cutter because I want the locations to have different personalities. But I want, no matter what, the customer to feel good when they leave."