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Begging for biscuits

Girl, 9, starts a dog treat business

BY PAULETTE LASH RITCHIE
SPECIAL TO THE STAR-BANNER

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OCALA - Samantha Senechal is 9 years old and likes math, particularly algebra, and dogs. She really likes dogs.

She has a Boston terrier she named Lucky. Her parents have another Boston terrier named Zappa. Samantha has a drawer full of stuffed dogs and a poster of dogs on her bedroom wall. It seemed a natural choice, then, for her to start a dog-themed business when she decided it was time to start making money.

She has been selling Sammy's Dog Treats for about two months now. "I really wanted to make some money for college," Samantha said.

She considered mowing lawns, but likes baking treats "much better."

Her mother, Stephanie Senechal, 35, said Samantha tried dog walking last year, but it didn't work out. "It's hard to take an 8-year-old seriously," she said.

The recipe for the dog treats took a lot of research, mother and daughter agreed. It began with a trip to the library. Samantha said they headed to "the grown-up section" and found a book containing a recipe with which they thought could work.

"We had to change it a lot," Stephanie Senechal said, "because we had to add preservatives and vitamins. Our biggest goal was to make sure it was safe for all dogs. It's all natural ingredients, but there's no sugar."

So, do dogs like them? Samantha demonstrated with a taste test.

Her mother handed a commercial dog treat to Lucky. He took it, but soon dropped it. Then he took one of Samantha's treats and gobbled it up.

"They've got to taste good to the dog," Stephanie Senechal said, "or they won't eat



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JANNET
WALSH/STAR-BANNER

Samantha "Sammy" Senechal, 9, operates her own business making and selling dog treats. Her love for dogs and mathematics inspired her to try dog businesses before, but now she feels a true calling.

'em."

When Samantha is doing her baking, the dogs sit at the gate to the kitchen and beg.

Lucky may love them, but Samantha does not recommend her treats for dog owners.

"You could probably eat it yourself," she said. "You could taste it without dying, but, trust me, it doesn't taste good."

Marketing is going slowly, but Samantha has high hopes of being on MSNBC's "The Big Idea" invention television show and a new show she says is coming to Animal Planet.

"She wants to make it big," Stephanie Senechal said. "She wants her own show."

Until then, Samantha markets her treats with her mother's help.

"I guess she steals my clients right now," Samantha's mother said, referring to her pet-sitting business, Paws 'n Clawz. Samantha also shares a Web site with her mother: www.pawsnclawz.com.

Sammy's Dog Treats come in three flavors: plain, milk and peanut butter. Samantha has made about \$100 since she began selling them, but is still learning about being a business kid and has a lot to learn about costs.

She has learned about sales tax, but hasn't computed the actual cost of each treat, including ingredients, electricity, labor, packaging, labeling and marketing.

The straight-A student, who plans to hire similarly aged employees when she expands her business, says she is very good at math.

The Senechals live in Silver Springs Shores. Samantha attends Belleview-Santos Elementary School and will be in fourth grade when school starts in August.

"They've got to taste good to the dog or they won't eat 'em."

Stephanie Senechal

On her daughter's recipe for doggy biscuits

OCALA -

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