

# COOLER *than* COOL



**Outkast's 2003 hit song "Hey Ya!"** asked the question: "What's cooler than being cool?" We have the answer: Taking the PETS+ America's Coolest Stores contest and updating it for 2021 and beyond. How did we do that? By dropping "Stores" from the name. The pet industry continues to evolve and did so at breakneck speed during the pandemic. While we have always used the term "stores" loosely in relation to the contest, more and more retail operations have added services such as grooming, self-wash, boarding, day care, training, dog walking, pet sitting, and even rescue as in the case of our first-place winner, Yuppy Puppy in O'Fallon, MO. We're excited to offer more inclusivity, and stay tuned for 2022 and additional changes that will make America's Coolest even better represent the answer to Outkast's question: ice cold!



**YUPPY PUPPY**

**2021 AMERICA'S COOLEST**



Jessica Cooke  
founded Yuppy  
Puppy in 2003.

## YUPPY PUPPY, O'FALLON, MO

# HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Pets and their people appreciate the exceptional care, stylish setting and charitable efforts of Yuppy Puppy in O'Fallon, MO.

**Nala wouldn't eat.** It was a day into her stay at Yuppy Puppy in O'Fallon, MO, and the Lab mix had turned up her nose at dinner and breakfast.

"We tried bone broth and mixers and pumpkin, but could not get her to eat," Jessica Cooke, owner of the boarding facility, spa and boutique, recalls. "So we reached out to mom and asked, 'Does Nala prefer a certain bowl? Or eating at a different time? What do you do that we are not doing?' She said, 'Oh my gosh. I

forgot to mention. You have to say her prayers, and then she'll eat.' I'll be darned if we didn't just say 'Thank you, Jesus, for this food. Amen,' and she ate!"

Cooke and her staff strive to make pets feel at home at Yuppy Puppy, whether they're staying overnight, spending the day at playcamp or getting a pampering groom — or all three with a little shopping on the way out.

"We do whatever it takes to help them thrive," she says.

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## FROM SALON TO MULTI-SERVICE HOTEL

**C**ooke has more than 25 years of pet care experience, from her beginnings as a veterinary technician then groomer, through 2003 when she opened Yuppy Puppy as a salon and boutique, to today with two locations of the now multi-service business. O’Fallon — our 2021 America’s Coolest first-place winner — opened in 2017.

It previously sat in a shopping center with a vet clinic next door, but when the landlord saw how well both businesses were doing, Cooke says he “astronomically” raised their rents. She and Dr. Marcy Hammerle had become friends and referred to each other over the years, so it only made sense to buy the lot across the street together for both Yuppy Puppy and The Pet Doctor.

“We built side by side to continue that relationship. Her clinic does not board, so any post-surgery, high-risk or diabetic pet, she sends to us. Any guest of ours who is a patient of hers, she can come check on during the stay. It is peace of mind for everyone involved. We also do medical grooming. The client makes an appointment with both of us, and we coordinate services,” Cooke explains, adding that they formed a company that owns the property and building, which then leases to their businesses. “We collect all payments separately and do not combine or cross finances.”

Yuppy Puppy and The Pet Doctor also have different aesthetics. The building itself looks like a modern farmhouse, with the vet clinic interiors embracing that style with exposed beams and barn wood accents. Cooke took a more glamorous approach.

“Think Chip and Joanna Gaines meets Ritz-Carlton,” she says.

Pink, white and black extend throughout the facility. In the lobby, high ceilings, crystal chandeliers and flower-filled vases contribute to the hotel look and feel, as does a vintage luggage cart. The check-in area shares space with the boutique, a collection of treats and chews, grooming products, and high-end accessories and toys. Birthdays bring out the shopper in pet parents, who can pick up party supplies to take home or add a celebration onto their dog’s stay.

Yuppy Puppy can accommodate



around 100 boarding dogs across its varying levels of suites and social lounge, which run from \$39 to \$69 a night. Each suite comes with fluffy bedding, raised cot and natural lighting. Classical music and pet-friendly essential oils soothe guests. Add-ons range from the practical such as training and extra exercise to pampering amenities like turndown service with snuggles and Sunday brunch that includes eggs, blueberries and greek yogurt served with bottomless distilled water. Just like with Nala, staff work to recreate as much of a pet’s routine as possible.

“If their person is a nurse and they are used to going potty at 2 a.m. and eating breakfast at 3 a.m., we will do that,” Cooke says.

Cats are welcome in the Fancy Feline Sanctuary Suites, which feature windows to the courtyard and climbing towers to recreate as much of the home experience as possible. Nearly 4,000 pets stayed at the facility from January through June of this year.

During the day, hotel guests can join attendees of Social Playcamp or have a staff member all to themselves in a Pampered Play session. All take part in enrichment activities and games both indoors and outside.

And because playcamp happens rain,

snow or shine, pet parents can and do book departure baths in Yuppy Puppy’s full-service salon, where Cooke can be found still grooming her clients two days a week.

“I love it. I still groom, but only two days a week and eight dogs total. I did more when I was younger, but two big Doodles in a day now, and I’m exhausted.”

## AND GROOMING SCHOOL

**L**ike most salon owners, Cooke faces the challenge of finding enough qualified groomers to hire. She created an apprenticeship program not only to meet the ever-growing demand for these services, but also to ensure that young groomers learn the skills they need to succeed long-term.

“I have nine full-time groomers, and each location books out a month in advance,” Cooke says. “I have five apprentices currently.”

Her program draws from her experience and many certifications, and takes two years from bather to full-time groomer. She stresses the importance of mastering basic skills first.

“If a month in, someone says, ‘I just want to scissor dogs,’ I tell them, ‘A good

## fast facts

**OWNER:** Jessica Cooke

**FOUNDED:** 2003

**OPENED FEATURED**

**LOCATION:** 2017

**AREA:** 6,974 sq. ft.

**EMPLOYEES:** 23 full-time, 26 part-time

**WEBSITE:** [yuppypuppyspa.com](http://yuppypuppyspa.com)

**FACEBOOK:** [/yuppypuppy](https://www.facebook.com/yuppypuppy)



bath and knowledge of behavior and breeds are the base. If you don't have that, I won't take you to the next level."

One of her first apprentices still works for Yuppy Puppy 15 years later. In general, the business has a high retention rate for groomers. It offers health insurance and generous compensation, and pays for continuing education. Those working at other salons regularly inquire about openings. Even groomers with experience must complete a working interview

and a two-week trial, during which they only work on rescue pups. This gives staff an opportunity to assess their skills and begin to continue training as needed.

## AND DOG RESCUE

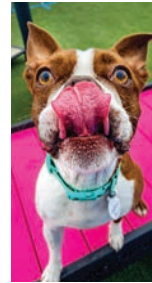
**A**lso in 2017, Cooke founded the nonprofit organization Yuppy Puppies Forever.

"Many elderly clients had passed, and we were getting approached by family members asking if we knew of anyone at our location who would adopt because they could not keep the dog for one reason or another, and it broke our hearts," she says. "We realized that we needed to become a rescue group as well."

That decision allowed Cooke to be ready, willing and able to help pets and people in need when the pandemic hit.

"All of our hotel guest reservations canceled. After I picked myself up off the floor, I dug deep and asked myself, 'What can I do to help?' I needed to get busy helping where I could. I needed to boost staff morale. So we filled our hotel with dogs from the local shelter," she says. "It created the feeling of business as usual, even though these were not paying guests. It felt good and has come full circle. The community appreciated our efforts and now knows of our rescue mission."

Thanks to Yuppy Puppies Forever and its supporters, 561 dogs to date have found a temporary home at the facility and new families, with 220 of those adoptions happening during the pandemic, from May through August of 2020. ▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 42



↑ Yuppy Puppy colors pink and black can even be found outdoors in the play yards.

## judge's comments

**BOB NEGEN:** The over-the-top support of local pet rescue will pay long-term dividends. Also, I love the brand consistency.

**ANNE OBARSKI:** Well done, Jessica Cooke! Your personal story is heart-warming, and your persistence has paid off. You are a great manager and have a system that works regarding hiring and promoting. Most of all, you got creative with the rescue when life turned upside down. Brilliant to have a relationship with a vet; that certainly gives you a niche that sets you apart. Proud of you. This is amazing!

**BOB AND SUSAN GOLDSTEIN:** Yuppy Puppy has a unique presence, and we enjoyed their story of growing from a grooming facility to expanding into a glamorous hotel, amongst their other upscale offerings. We loved learning about the nonprofit organization. Keep up with the great work with your rescue!

**CHLOE DIVITA:** Jessica Cooke knows and sticks to her branding. Really love how Yuppy Puppy has a rescue and helps rescue dogs in their boarding facility, especially during COVID. Also great to work side by side with a local vet.

**TAMMY VASQUEZ:** I love this place!





◀ Cooke treats guests at the Yuppy Puppy check-in desk, which would look just at home in a hotel for humans.

◀ FROM PAGE 41

The rescue continues to pull shelter dogs who need grooming, training and/or medical care, in addition to those whose people have passed. Cooke and her staff get to know the pups well before making them available for meet and greets, and even then the process works more like matchmaking than that of a typical adoption. Approved adopters get to meet three pre-selected dogs who fit their background and lifestyle.

“If they live in an apartment, they’re not getting the 1-year-old Husky,” she ex-

plains. “We tell them which dogs will be best for them and why.

“Once we all decide on a match, the adopters come back two more times or more. We go over expectations and help transition when go-home day is finally here. We make sure everyone in the home, including other dogs, are all the perfect fit and continue to be there for them should any issues arise.”

As part of that support, Yuppy Puppy offers 50 percent off all services for life.

“Because of all this, we’ve only had sev-

en dogs returned. Seven total.”

Another impressive number: 75 percent of the dogs get adopted by existing clients. If Cooke sees a guest dog and an adoptable dog hit it off during playcamp, she will let the client know.

“Like with Beasie, this Leonberger who comes all the time to camp. She’s lazy and likes dogs who look and act like her. And we had this dog come into the rescue, Bucky. I saw the client checking out and said, ‘Come here. I’ve got somebody to show you. He’s like oh my gosh who is this. I told him, well Beasie’s already met Bucky and loves him so bring your wife back tomorrow.’ He didn’t even know he was looking for another dog.”

## AND A SECOND LOCATION

In April of this year, Cooke opened the second Yuppy Puppy in nearby Cottleville. She and Hammerle teamed up again with John Hooker, who built the O’Fallon facilities. He owns the land and saw their success as a sure bet.

Cooke doesn’t rule out additional duplication of their homes away from home.

“It started with a brush and a dream, and now 18 years later I have two multi-million-dollar locations. I feel like I’m nowhere near being done.”

## 5 more cool things about yuppy puppy

★ **LOOK CLOSELY:** Everything from signage to door tags to report cards bears the Yuppy Puppy



logo. A more subtle version even repeats in the building’s wallpaper.

★ **HUMAN RESOURCES:** “We have 49 staff members. I know, that’s high,” Cooke says. “I get yelled at by my accountant every year for ‘having too many people making too much money.’ At the end of the day, I have fantastic staff who are loyal and believe in our mission and want to help us succeed, so I want to help them succeed by paying them well and promoting within.” In addition to offer-

ing health benefits to full-time employees, she brings in agents for self-paid vision and dental insurance, and retirement accounts. She even paid for self-defense training for her staff, the majority of whom are women, and sent a single mom and her five daughters on a well-deserved, surprise Disney vacation.

★ **PRIVACY, PLEASE:** Not all dogs are easygoing. Cooke recognizes this and offers private grooming sessions with the pet parent in the room for nervous pups,

and the Pampered Play option gives guests who don’t like other dogs one-on-one time with a staff member for customized play and enrichment.

★ **CAR SERVICE:** Yuppy Puppy picks up pets and brings them home within a 5-mile radius. It goes the extra miles with guests undergoing treatment at Mizzou Animal Cancer Center. A dog named Freckles stayed at the facility for three months while he was undergoing radiation treatment because his family lived in Iowa. Staff

shuttled him back and forth, and provided an update after every visit.

★ **PROMOTE FROM WITHIN:** Just like grooming apprentices start as bathers, all other employees begin as cleaners and work their way up. Cooke says, “That way, no one starts above anyone else. Everyone has to pick up poop, take out the trash, wishy-wash the yard, do the laundry. I’m not going to have them feed dogs and talk to clients if they’re above changing out toilet paper.”

# MORE OF America's COOLEST

These **nine pet businesses** round out the 2021 list of Top 10 America's Coolest. Each will be profiled in an upcoming issue.



## THE SEATTLE BARKERY SEATTLE, WA

Dawn and Benjamin Ford started with one doggie treat truck in 2014 and have since added three more plus a brick-and-mortar store. Their cakes are a visual delight, with The Seattle Barkery on track to sell more than 4,000 in 2021. The couple smartly designed the trucks and store to truly suit their customers: The store has a walk-up window for people and pups on the go, and all "locations" have a Treat Chute to deliver delicious morsels right into a dog's mouth.



## THE PUBLIC PET HONOLULU, HI

Jordan Lee and Matthew Guevara have created a space where pets and pet nutrition intersect with their love of urban art and culture, fashion and sustainability. A colorful mural by Matthew Tapia adorns an exterior wall, and artists on staff are able to sell on consignment their human and pet products — everything from pins and stickers to masks and T-shirts. Lee says, "We carefully curate our stock so that each category isn't overly saturated, leaving room for conversation as to why we believe in our product selection."

## BROWN DOG BAKERY ANKENY, IA

A dog could visit Brown Dog Bakery every day for three months and try a different treat each time. Anna and Jeffrey Woodcock keep the bulk bins stocked with 30 to 35 biscuit flavors and 66 varieties of chews. Add to that an ever-changing selection of decorated cookies, and it's a wonder how pet parents can get their dogs to leave. "It's a lot of options," Anna says. "I love helping my customers treat their pups!"



★★★ MORE OF AMERICA'S COOLEST



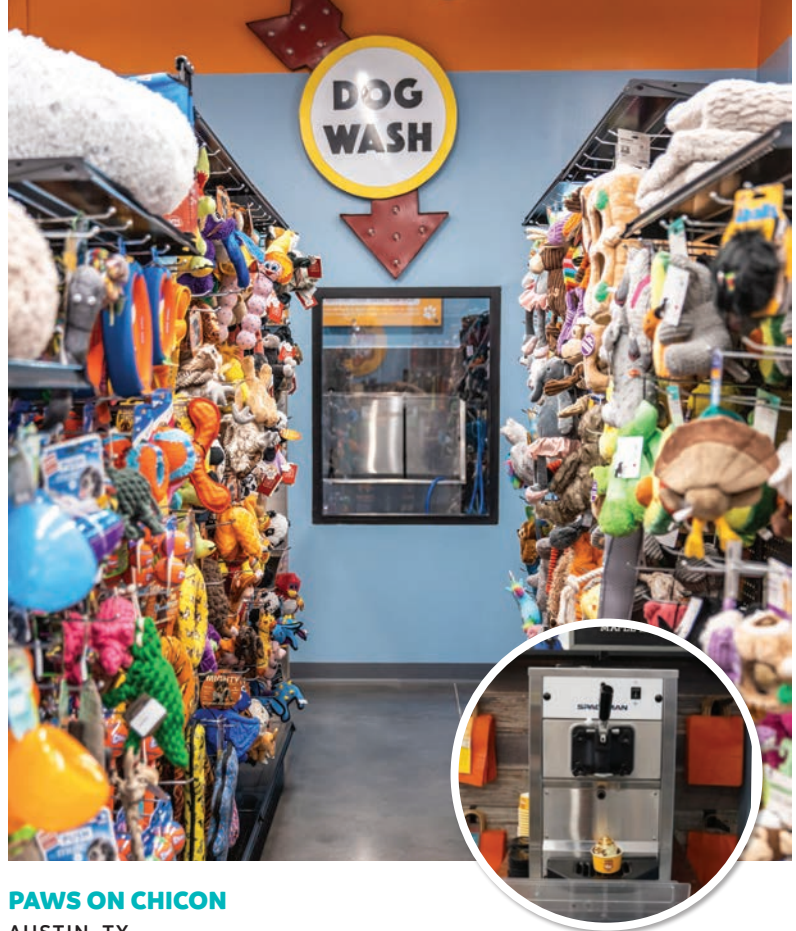
◆ Nicole Cammack, right, attracts customers with her expertise in raw feeding.

**NORTHPOINT PETS & COMPANY**  
CHESHIRE, CT

Nicole Cammack's deep knowledge of functional nutrition and food safety have earned her the respect of pet parents, fellow retailers and industry experts alike. Undogmatic, her online journal, covers everything from supplementation advice to aflatoxin contamination, and sends customers to her NorthPoint Pets & Company, which has 15 glass-door freezers filled with products she recommends. Cammack will build on her graduate work in functional nutrition next by pursuing her doctorate.

**LUCKY DOGS**  
SKANEATELES, NY

Amy Schiek started Lucky Dogs in 2008 with pet sitting and dog walking, and has since added Bubble Bus mobile grooming and a 1,200-square-foot store, plus husband Pat to oversee business operations. Fixtures came from the space's previous tenant, a high-end baby boutique, and pair perfectly with graphic black and white wallpaper. Amy says, "Kids love to point out all of the dog breeds they recognize." The couple are truly part of their community, hosting a Dogs of Skaneateles Facebook group, where they share tips and memes, and take live video walks with their Labs Saoirse and Caoimhe.



**PAWS ON CHICON**  
AUSTIN, TX

First-time customers at Paws on Chicon, whether in-store or online, get a handwritten thank you note from Keith Zeiler in the mail, complete with a coupon to return for a free doggy fro-yo. That personal touch begins to build the trust and rapport he and his team are known for. It also has grown sales of the tasty, healthy treat made with goat milk to 600 servings per month. Pups pull their owners toward the store, in fact, even though many of them know a stop at the pet-wash station may come first.



**THE GREEN K9**  
URBANA, MD

Marni Lewis checks a long list when sourcing products for The Green K9: minimally processed, certified humanely raised, and free of dyes or preservatives. Bonus points for recycled and recyclable, sustainable, organic and unique, made and sourced in the U.S. or even locally. She applies similar standards to store materials, with shelving made from building timbers and a front counter featuring wood from whiskey barrels. Even some of her signage is reusable, with chalkboards serving as educational art.



**LUCKY DOG PET GROCERY & BAKERY**  
LAWRENCE, KS

Whimsical front windows give those who approach an idea of the customer experience to expect at Lucky Dog Pet Grocery & Bakery. The team, led by mother-daughter duo Jennifer Thomas and Sarah Ybarra, knows how to have fun — whether it be curbside pickups brought out by a human wearing a “cone of shame,” custom birthday cakes complete with a yogurt-and-pencil pet portrait on the box, or the annual Hairy Pawtter celebration. Thanks to this positive attitude and adaptability, the business ended 2020 up 20 percent.



**WAGGING TAILS PET RESORT & SPAW**  
WOLCOTT, CT

Located on 6 acres, Wagging Tails Pet Resort & Spa features 5,000 square feet of turf and the state’s only Ultimate Air Dogs 45-foot saltwater pool and 40-foot dock. Customers travel from all over Connecticut to board their dogs at the facility, and dock diving teams travel from as far as Maine and Maryland to train and compete. During the pandemic, Krista Lofquist introduced “Try It!” This brought in newcomers to the sport who paid \$25 for 30 minutes to see if their dog would actually make the leap. More than 30 a day gave it a try in the summer months!

**meet the judges**



**BOB NEGEN** opened a small specialty kite store in 1981 and spent the next 20 years growing his business and learning how to be a successful merchant. In 1999, he and wife Susan founded WhizBang! Retail Training. They have since traveled the world teaching store owners and managers the nuts-and-bolts skills needed to run successful retail businesses.



**ANNE OBARSKI** is the founder and CEO of Merchandise Concepts, which works with organizations to create astonishing customer service experiences at every touch-point. As a professional speaker and retail coach, she shares strategic ideas to see repeat customers referring others because of their infectious, enviable, repeatable and remarkable customer service experiences.



**DR. BOB AND SUSAN GOLDSTEIN** founded Earth Animal Ventures in 1979, which develops and manufactures premium and natural organic herbal remedies, supplements, food and treats formulated by Dr. Bob. They also partner in the Healing Center for Animals, an integrative veterinary consultation practice, and the Earth Animal Retail Store in Westport, CT.



**CHLOE DIVITA**, co-founder of media company All Pet Voices and the online community BlogPaws, brings 10-plus years of digital and influencer marketing experience and six-plus years of performance coaching to help entrepreneurs, influencers and brands communicate their content to their audience. She is head performance coach for TEDxCambridge, the longest running TEDx event.



**TAMMY VASQUEZ** and husband Mike own Bark Life, a 14,000-square-foot store, day care and cage-free pet resort in Seminole, FL. Bark Life won first place in the 2020 PETS+ America’s Coolest Stores contest.