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Going to the dogs

Humans roll over for yummy canine treats

BY MICHAEL POLLICK

It's not just dogs that are snapping up dog treats these days. People are eating them, too.

Gina Garcia's interest in dog biscuits began because she was bored and hungry while working the late shift at Pet Supply Center, a popular Sarasota pet food store that specializes in high-end, wholesome foods for dogs and cats.

"I have tried all of them, really," Garcia said. "They won't fill me up; just one or two, and I'll be OK till dinner time."

Garcia is not alone.

Seattle's Blue Dog Bakery cranks out millions of all-natural dog biscuits a year, and guess what? They have an avid human following.

The company has even posted testimonials on its Web site, www.bluedogbakery.com, from people who make their dogs share with them.

Like many of today's better biscuits, those made by Blue Dog are touted as low-fat, natural, and containing no animal byproducts, phrases that mean a lot to the dogs' human benefactors.

The treats are made in a bakery that also produces cookies for human beings, and the ingredients -- including blackstrap molasses, whole wheat flour, and rolled oats -- are approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for human consumption.

What has happened over the years is that Blue Dog's human customers started nibbling on the peanut butter treats because they are satisfying the way a cookie is, but contain no sugar.

"We have thousands of people who eat our dog biscuits," said Blue Dog spokeswoman Margot Kenly.

Rosie, of Walnut Creek, Calif., wrote in her testimonial: "I bought the Blue Dog biscuits for a group of Weight Watcher walkers who bring their animals along. When I opened the



Bernie Kautz, a customer of Pet Supply Center, admits sampling food he feeds to his year-old Kerry blue terrier, Mish-Ka. Kautz is not alone.



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box, there was this luscious smell. I passed a biscuit to a fellow member, who smelled it, broke it in two and took a bite. I ate the other half and then ate three more. Will I start lifting my leg around house soon? I'm serious, these are delicious!"

Rosie could not be reached for an interview, but another Blue Dog fan was glad to talk about her mild, and slightly unusual, addiction.

Kathy Berk of Van Nuys, Calif., bought Blue Dog Peanut Butter & Molasses flavor treats for her three Labrador retrievers, but found herself irresistibly attracted by the aroma.

"I opened up the bag to give them one, and it smelled reaaaallllly good," Berk said. "I read the ingredients and there was nothing on the ingredient label that wasn't human quality, so I tried it and it was reaaaallllly good."

Berk, who like Rosie follows the Weight Watcher program, decided to call Blue Dog's toll-free phone number to determine the fiber and fat content of the cookies, so she would know how to count them as part of her diet.

It turned out that Blue Dog Bakery has not measured the cookies by human standards because it is prohibited by law from labeling the treats for both dogs and humans.

Since then, however, someone Berk knows has analyzed the Blue Dog treats and found they fit into the Weight Watchers program fairly well, because they have high fiber and very little sugar.

Berk said she now eats the dog treats regularly, popping one into her own mouth when she is about to hand them out to her canine companions.

"I had one this morning," Berk said.

The ritual has apparently grown important to Berk's dogs.

"They get really upset when they see me take one and they don't get one. They sit there with a quizzical look on their face."

The Blue Dog Bakery dog cookies haven't been on the shelves long enough in Southwest Florida to show whether they will win a following among dogs or humans.

The Sarasota PetSmart just started trying them out, a manager said.

But it turns out Blue Dog Bakery is just the latest in a long string of dog treats that make humans drool.

"People eat 'Exclusively Dog Cookies,'" said Kathy Kurzydlo, who also works at the Pet Supply Center but prefers not to eat dog biscuits herself.

She explained that the carob-flavored Exclusively brand dog treats are "packaged exactly like Oreo cookies."

"I know of at least three instances where people have taken them out of the package and eaten them," Kurzydlo said.

This isn't one of those stories about old people who eat cat food because their pensions have dried up: A 36-ounce box of Bark Bars -- one of Garcia's favorites -- retails for a hefty \$8.99.

No statistics are available on human consumption of dog treats. While some people get a funny look on their face when you mention it, others think it's as natural as can be.

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Bernie Kautz, who was visiting Pet Supply Center on Wednesday with his striking year-old Kerry blue terrier Mish-Ka, says he doesn't know how it happened, but that he has sampled virtually every food his dog now eats.

"I'm not saying to have a whole bowl of it ... but I guess I've tried all his treats, just to see what they taste like," Kautz said.

He offered a sample of a dry, trout-flavored dog food.

"It does have a little aftertaste," he admitted.

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