

Auburn Hills Businesses Run the Gamut, But This Particular One's Gone to the Dogs

by Irena Granaas

An Auburn Hills woman has created a growing business out of her passion for the sport of dog agility.

Darlene Woz is the owner of Rubber On the Run, "surfacing for agility obstacles and more." She has perfected her own process of creating permanent rubber surfaces specially designed for dog agility course obstacles.

Woz explains the resulting rubber "skins" form reliable, long-lasting high traction rubber surfaces commonly used in agility courses, like the nine-foot A-frame, two broad ramps with a hinged connection; the seesaw or teeter-totter, and the dogwalk, which has three eight- or 12-foot planks, 12 inches wide, connected at the ends, which the dog must traverse up and down.

The business is something she more or less "fell into" as a result of her own involvement in dog agility, because the need was there and no one else was doing it. She has developed the business from something she used to do from her garage to the growing enterprise it is today, conducted from a facility she rents in downtown Auburn Hills.

"I guess there's just a need for this, and a want," she said. "But the best part of it is, I get to bring my dogs (Dalmatians Wilson and Harley) to work with me every day."

The permanent rubber surface created by proper execution of the chemical process gives the dogs better traction, which enhances the animals' safety while negotiating the course. Dog agility is a competitive, fast-paced sport where a human handler directs a dog through an obstacle course. It started in the U. K. in the 1970s, "crossed the pond" to the U.S. in 1985, and has now become a global sport.

Woz is expert in performing the process that bonds the rub-

ber granules that form the skins using the chemical binder in a way that results in a consistently smooth, even, tough rubber skin that lasts for years. The product can be adapted to multiple purposes. For example, Woz said one of her employees uses it for a rubber deck at her home. This is the same rubber granule surface that is used to make running tracks and children's playgrounds.

Anyone can buy the raw materials, she noted, but when she began making skins, most of the people she knew in the agility circuit didn't know how to do it properly or just didn't want to work with the chemical binder themselves.

She and her employees create the rubber skins to order, or, for those who prefer to make their own, they can use Woz's process "without re-inventing the wheel." If it doesn't conflict with her schedule, Woz also allows people who want to learn how to do this themselves to visit her facility for a day or two and get instruction.

"It's such a simple process," she said. "A surface can be made in a couple of hours. I just took the knowledge that was already out there, but the application turned out to be so vast, where the rubber surfacing can be applied to anything, that the process I developed is now being used around the world."

Woz offers kits people can buy, or they can buy the rubber granules and the chemical binder directly from American Recycling Center Inc. in Owosso. If the buyer isn't confident they can complete the process of making the skins themselves, Woz has published a book, "Making Rubber Skins for Agility Equipment," available at Woz's shop or online at www.rubberontherun.com.

"By mixing it properly, anyone can do it. It's got a very low learning curve," she said.

Woz has run the business for the past two-and-a-half years out

of the downtown Auburn Hills facility.

Woz's years in dog agility and her 18 years as a judge means she understands what her agility customers want and need. She has been active in the sport since the mid-1980s, with Dotty, her first dalmatian, shortly after the sport came to Michigan in 1986.

Woz found that Dalmatians are stubborn and difficult to train, and she found agility training helps build a stronger relationship between owner and dog.

"It gives you the next level of involvement, and the training is forever," she said. "I guess it's become a way of life . . . It's not as intense as being an athlete, but this is physical activity you do with your dog and you just get hooked on it."

She added the dogs benefit, too, gaining physical fitness, keener agility and a closer relationship with their owner.

As a judge Woz traveled to 41 states, numerous provinces in Canada, Bermuda, Finland, France, England, Germany, Slovenia and Italy.

Along the way, she became an expert in dog agility course obstacles and the regulations used on the competitive agility circuit.

At this point, Woz hasn't yet made a fortune, but she is gaining new customers, managing to cover her bills and compensate her two employees, she said,



Darlene Woz with stuffed office dalmatian and sample of product

with "generous" paychecks.

"That's a big chunk of my expenses, but my bills are paid and I've never been in debt," she said.

Woz has been married to her husband and fellow dog lover, Roger, who has assisted her in

making most of the work tables she uses, for 30 years.

Rubber On the Run is located at 70 S. Squirrel Rd., Unit G, in downtown Auburn Hills. She has a website, RubberontheRun.com, and can be contacted by email at rubberontherun@comcast.net.

Auburn Hills Recognized as Friendly To Its Aging Community Members

Just like death and taxes, it's certain that most people will one day become senior citizens, so it's nice to know that the city of Auburn Hills is rated a very good place to ease into one's golden years.

The Michigan Office of Services to the Aging (OSA) and the Commission on Services to the Aging have designated the city of Auburn Hills as a "Community for a Lifetime."

The honor is in recognition of the city's efforts to be an aging-friendly community.

The "Community for a Lifetime" recognition was established back in 2007 as part of a nationwide effort to respond to the needs of the country's rapidly aging population.

Qualifying communities must conduct a self-assessment or initiate an improvement that meets the program's goals on being aging-friendly.

"As a city and a community, we are constantly striving for inclusion of residents of all ages, but we never lose sight of the changing needs of residents as they age," said Assistant City Manager Tom Tanghe. "With a walkable downtown, an active senior center and senior-focused activities,

and numerous outreach services – including a Meals on Wheels program that fed more than 10,000 people in 2012 – the city is notably engaged in improving the quality of life for our senior community. We are honored to have our efforts recognized by the state."

Auburn Hills' strengths, as cited by OSA, include a range of home chore services options as well as multiple community events designed to promote inclusion and civic engagement of the elderly in the city's life. The city was also cited for its comprehensive walkway system.

According to Tanghe, the city conducted a self-assessment on numerous issues including walkability, access to health care, transportation, safety and security, housing, supportive community systems, commerce, enrichment and inclusion.

To learn more about the Auburn Hills Senior Citizen Services, contact Karen Adcock at kadcock@auburnhills.org.

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