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## **Catering to man's best friend**

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The pet business is booming on Long Island, according to Tom Scarda, a Wantagh-based consultant with FranChoice, which counsels prospective franchisees. Scarda cited Humane Society figures stating that there are 554,000 dogs living on Long Island.

Nationwide numbers on the pet industry bear out Scarda's statement. Consumer Reports calculated that Americans spent more than \$43 billion on pets in 2008, a 5 percent increase over the previous year. The American Animal Hospital Association found that 94 percent of respondents believe their pets have human-like personality traits and a majority of pets sleep either in or on the owner's bed. When asked "Who listens to you best?" 45 percent of respondents chose their pet over their spouse.

Those numbers mean people will pay for pet pampering.

Why the spike? Aggressive marketing, McMullen said, but don't forget love. "People are willing to go out of their way for their loved ones," he said.

Naomi Garfinkel, president of Great Neck-based Pet Sitters Club saw her business grow 15 percent last year over the previous year, and saw her business steadily expand along the North Shore. Even in a soft economy, people are still willing to pay to keep their pets happy, she said.