

# Going to the dogs

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Forget what you've heard about race, gender or ethnicity. There are really only two types of people.

Those who own dogs, and those who don't.

There are, however, subgroups within the former category. There are those who treat their dogs like, well, dogs. And then there are those who treat them like furry people.

It is the second subgroup that flocks to places like Wiskers Pet Beastro and Bowteek on Second Street in Belmont Shore. Wiskers opened almost a year ago, and sells a variety of leashes, dog bowls and shampoos. But what draws the eye is the large refrigerated glass case in the back of the store. It is filled with baklava, cookies, brownies and lusciously frosted cakes (You can get those personalized, courtesy of Grandma's Sugarplums down the street).

Mmmm. Baklava.

But wait. That's ``Bark-la-va." And why does that cake have a milkbone on it?

Silly human! These treats are for dogs!

Or are they?

``I ate milk bones when I grew up," confessed Scott Rinehart, one

of Wiskers' three owners.

Wiskers co-owner Jim Poer, however, does not confess to such culinary adventuring. But he and Rinehart are happy to say that any of the treats they sell can be consumed by humans.

And they sometimes are. One diabetic customer, Rinehart said, buys the teddy bear-shaped carob brownies each week, and feeds half of them to her dog. The others are for her.

And, since the treats are lowfat, contain no preservatives, and no bad things like dairy and refined sugar, they may be better for that customer than what she would find in a bakery for humans, Rinehart said.

“It's been fun,” said Poer of the Wiskers experience so far.

And successful.

“Every person who comes into the store (who buys something) doesn't leave without buying something out of the bakery,” Rinehart said.

Still, a bakery for dogs? Who on earth would think up such an idea in the first place?

Not just Rinehart, Poer and their third partner, Carolyn Johnson. (Johnson, incidentally, is the company's cat spokesperson. She has six felines, and because of her, the bakery case contains a few cat treats, including tuna birthday cakes. There will be more soon.)

Bakeries for dogs can be found all over the country. There is even a national chain, called Three Dog Bakery, with a location in Old Town Pasadena. The chain shows no signs of waning.

Rinehart and Poer hope Wiskers will expand in the same way.

They are looking to open a store in Orange County. Unlike Wiskers in Long Beach, the new one will be mostly a bakery. Zoning laws on Second Street do not allow for a complete bakery.

Blame the good economy. Also, blame places like Petsmart, Petco and Pets.com, which have allowed pet owners to be more open about indulging their fur-children.

Bakeries for dogs (and cats, too) are simply the latest thing. And unlike the mega pet stores, they also tap into this country's increasing obsession with organic foods.

But does healthy mean tasty?

Poer and Rinehart get their treats from two different bakers, one in San Diego, one in Los Angeles. The bakers test their wares on their dogs. In fact, the Peanut Butter Yaki, a soft bone-shaped treat, is named after one of the bakers' dogs, Rinehart said.

Then there are Wiskers own inhouse testers: Toby, a 1year-old golden labrador, and Chuck, a 7-year-old German Shepherd. The two have treats named after them as well: Toby's Barbecue Biscuit and Chuck's Chicken Bones.

“Chuck's pretty particular, so Chuck is used as a source,” Poer said.

But since Chuck, after all, relies on sales for his livelihood, we at the Food section could not resist putting together a crack unit of canine testers.

We asked staff writer Wendy Thomas Russell to ask her two male dogs, Huckleberry and Henson, to be testers. And since we also wanted the girls' perspective, we asked staff writer John Cox to ask his pets, Penny and Juju, if they'd help. Luckily, all four dogs agreed.

We gave them samples of Bark-la-va, made of apples and walnuts and dough; Peanut Butter Yakies; Peanut Butter Puppies, a hard dog-shaped doggie biscuit, and the Breakfast Bacon Croissant. Here are the results of the test:

### **BAR-K-LA-VA:**

**Huckleberry:** Smelled it, licked it and walked away.

**Henson:** Tried to snatch it off the coffee table before it was formally offered to him. When given the green light, he ate it immediately and charged for Huck's portion.

**Penny:** Took half of her share to a favorite rug and buried it within the folds as soon as Juju looked away. The rest she carried around, watching to see what else might be handed out. She finally dropped it on the carpet and lay down munchless.

**Juju:** Nibbled while waiting for Penny's ruling. The crumbs interested her more than the pastry itself, until she could peel off the flaky part and lick the filling.

### **PEANUT BUTTER PUPPY:**

**Huckleberry:** Chewed the biscuit into a few pieces, then ate most of the pieces and seemed content.

**Henson:** Ate it immediately. Licked the crumbs.

**Penny:** Paid no attention at all. Milk bones, which are just as crunchy, also do nothing for her.

**Juju:** Chomped for joy. Her share was quick work, and Penny's was next.

### **BREAKFAST BACON CROISSANT:**

**Huckleberry:** Smelled it for a considerable length of time. Acted scared. Backed away.

**Henson:** Ate it immediately, then fearlessly finished off what Huck had left.

**Penny:** Kept hiding hers then going back to move it somewhere else because Juju was looking. The filling hooked her, and she scraped it clean before eating the rest.

**Juju:** Sniffed and licked until she saw Penny dig in, at which point she settled down to eat the treat from the inside out.

### **PEANUT BUTTER YAKI:**

**Huckleberry:** Knowing Huck's penchant for soft snacks but sensing he was feeling pressured by the taste test, Huck's humans put this snack aside. Later that night, Huck savored it slowly on the couch while watching ``The Crocodile Hunter" on the Discovery Channel.

**Henson:** Ate it immediately. Begged for more.

**Penny:** Tried burying this treat in four different corners, at one point hunkering down beneath a low side table with her rear end outward. Back to her favorite rug, she savored each chunk. Penny was still licking the outside of her mouth long after she had finished her two helpings.

**Juju:** Did nothing but watch Penny, at first. When Penny came around for seconds, Juju marked her own with a lick. Then she lay down next to it and resumed watching Penny. Juju didn't eat a morsel of this treat.

### **OUR CANINE TESTERS**

## **Huckleberry**

**Breed:** Coon Hound

**Age:** 3

**Eating habits:** Finicky

**Favorite food:** Tuna

## **Henson**

**Breed:** Dalmatian

**Age:** 5

**Eating habits:** Gluttonous

**Favorite food:** Vanilla ice cream

## **Penny**

**Breed:** Pinscher mix

**Age:** 3

**Eating habits:** Choosy

**Favorite food:** Home-baked buttered bread

## **Juju**

**Breed:** Shepherd mix

**Age:** 1 1/2 years

**Eating habits:** Omnivorous

**Favorite food:** Crunchy bones or jerky