

**young achievers**

Written by Elizabeth McCabe  
Photos by Tara Myers



tween owners of  
**LUCA'S DOG BOUTIQUE**



If you know of any kids in the neighborhood who excel in academics, sports, or has a special talent, we want to hear about them! Please contact [ccnews@n2pub.com](mailto:ccnews@n2pub.com) to nominate a Young Achiever.

It's clear 2020 has been a tough time for all, including dogs! We have discovered healthy dog treat options that are not only scrumptious, but organic and high in protein. Introducing: Luca's Dog Boutique!

In 2014, Country Club Neighborhood resident, Susan Johnson, hosted an Art Camp at her home on the creek on Sunnyside for her seven-year-old twin nieces, Kate and Elli Johnson, and their best friends Lauren Seim, Emery Engelsma, and Rylie Nelson who reside in Morningside. Over the years, Art Camp evolved into much more, launching into the business realm. Kate explains, "We are all passionate about animals and liked the idea of becoming entrepreneurs."

Kate, Lauren, Emery, Rylie, and Elli were just 10 years old when they started Luca's Dog Boutique in 2017. Luca, their namesake and Chief Dog Officer, is Susan's dog. Susan is an entrepreneur and knows the startup and growth process. She explains, "Ultimately this is the girls' company- they make the decisions; I just guide them along the way." Kate laughs, "Susan has three new nieces."

Within a year, they formed an LLC and hired bakers to meet customer demand. By 2019, they opened an online store, added new products, and updated their packaging. This year's pandemic increased the demand for healthy dog treats, so they expanded their product line.

The girls continue to rotate job responsibilities within the company, but they all have their favorite roles. Kate enjoys the graphic design work. Lauren told her dad she may be interested in a sales career after their first pop-up store and she likes using social media to promote their business. Emery is the editor of all important content, while Rylie and Elli are the creative ones of the bunch. Rylie says, "We support each other and are always there for one another."

Their product line and packaging has evolved to become more professional; it initially included charmed leashes with hand sanitizers and jewelry, and now focuses on their organic, high protein dog treat recipes. The treats are available online with free local delivery and at Linden Hills Farmers Market and Serge & Jane's.

Initially, they gathered to bake their products at Sunnyside, but as demand increased, they hired senior bakers from 7500 York Co-op in Edina and then sourced to a professional bakery. This Fall, they transitioned again to a non-profit bakery, where adults with disabilities are baking the treats. The girls feel this is a great fit for their business!

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(L to R): Rylie, Susan, Luca, Emery, Kate, Lauren, and Ellie



Kate Johnson



Emery Engelsma



Lauren Seim



Rylie Nelson



Elli Johnson with Luca

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Luca's Dog Boutique is licensed by the State of Minnesota, approved by the Department of Agriculture, and their treats are required to be analyzed by an independent lab. The analysis revealed the treats are higher in protein than many commercial brands. They contain grain, which is important for the health of the dog's heart shown in veterinary medicine clinical studies. Plus, they are completely organic—no antibiotics, fertilizer, sludge, or preservatives.

The girls want to take their company to the “next level”—ultimately to be on the shelves at Target. As their company grows, they are continually learning about sourcing organic ingredients, inventory management, managing margins, maintaining quality, and most importantly, understanding their customers.

They are profitable with a positive cash flow, but being successful means sharing. They believe that every dog deserves a happy home, which is why part of their proceeds are donated to the Animal Humane Society. Their profits have also been shared with a few other great non-profits, too. Elli says, “We appreciate your business and want to let you know that the more you buy, the more we can give!”

The girls are gaining unique experience and lessons learned that are different from those learned at school or their extracurricular activities. Starting a business at 10 years old will be a big stand out on their college applications and resumes. Lauren explains, “Owning and developing our business at a young age will help us in the long run; and it's rewarding to get that paycheck!” Elli adds, “We've become better speakers and are more confident meeting new people and making a good first impression.”

Emery says, “I love getting together, conducting meetings, and packaging all the treats. It's a big accomplishment!” Rylie continues, “I love sharing this passion with my friends. Working with these girls has made an impact on my life and I feel prepared if I ever want to start another business later on in life.” Kate sums it up, “We're really proud of what we have accomplished so far. We have struggled, but have figured out how to overcome obstacles and found solutions to continue to be successful.”

The girls would like to say thank you all who have supported them, including France 44 Wine and Cheese for providing them a pop-up store venue and being a great sounding board. Elli says, “Susan has also been a big help; we couldn't have gotten this far without her.” Kate adds, “She is a good role model for us and our business.”

“Thank you to all of our families! They support us, drive us to meetings, and help us” says Lauren, “We also want to thank our bakers and suppliers who are all very important.” Emery underscores, “Most importantly, we want to thank the neighborhood and customers for supporting our business. They took a chance on us!”

With new flavors coming, they have devised a new sample packet program and will be distributing to Country Club neighborhood mail boxes before the holidays to increase brand awareness. They continue to seek retail and wholesale opportunities and pop up store venues to help grow the brand.

Follow them on Instagram #lucasdoggboutique and online [www.lucasdoggboutique.com](http://www.lucasdoggboutique.com). For more information [sjohnson@magellanmed.com](mailto:sjohnson@magellanmed.com) and [lucasboutique2@gmail.com](mailto:lucasboutique2@gmail.com).