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THE [ONLY] BOCA RATON MAGAZINE

hometown [MEET THE EXPERT]

Pet Project

A BOCA WOMAN PROMOTES ANIMAL WELLNESS THROUGH HER STORE'S HEALTHY CUISINE.

The patients don't have much to say for themselves when they show up at **Barbara Ratner's** door. There may be a German Shepherd with diarrhea, a bulldog with allergies, a Beagle with a weight problem. But they all could use what Ratner is selling—holistic pet food, most of it raw and freeze-dried raw.

Ratner says nutrition is the "stepping stone" to an animal's health. By boosting their immune systems with the living enzymes in raw gluten-free, non-processed food, animals can stave off a wide range of ailments, from allergies and diabetes to weight problems and cancer.

"The immune systems start in their intestines," Ratner says. "If it's not healthy, you are going to have sick pups. There are too many vaccines out there, too many chemicals we are treating dogs with."

Ratner learned that the hard way when she lost her cat to renal failure associated with the massive pet food recall scandal of 2007. It was then that the former Saks buyer from New York started studying animal nutrition; she was inspired to open Holistic Pet Cuisine (1000 Clint Moore Road, 561/241-9151) two years after she and her husband, Howard, moved to Boca Raton in 2003.

Today, the store (which also delivers) offers everything from probiotics and supplements to frozen raw foods, pet beds and more. The best product may be the message Ratner tirelessly transmits: Feed your pets healthy diets. And stop relying on vaccines, medicines and commercial pet foods.

—MARIE SPEED



ON GOING ORGANIC:

"Organic is great, but we want to get people away from store-bought to holistic—treating the whole body. You can treat diabetes, skin issues, intestinal issues and stress with good food. We have helped more dogs with colitis than doctors have."

HOW TO GET A CHUBBY DOG TO LOSE WEIGHT: "Dry food will put more weight on a dog because of all the carbs. Raw food can slim them down; it's night and day."

HOW TO GET A PICKY DOG TO EAT: "I don't think any dog is picky if you are giving it food that is closest to human grade, like we carry here. Give it the freeze-dried raw food, and it's no longer a picky dog."

BIGGEST MISTAKE OWNERS MAKE: "They think they can feed their dogs table scraps and pull all their meals together with inferior dog food. Table scraps are not complete; they do not give the dog the total amino acid platter. Most people don't know how to make their own food, much less the kind of food a dog should eat."

SUCCESS STORIES: "Anyone who walks in the store is a success story for me—because they have come to the right place. My customers listen. They are like my family now. They trust me. It's so rewarding. I believe in what I do, and it works."

AARON BRISTOL