

SMALL BUSINESS

How They Did It

A look at how a small business tackled a challenge

Who: Michael Baugh, certified professional dog trainer, of **North Coast Dogs LLC**, on Madison Avenue in Lakewood and Center Road in Brunswick.

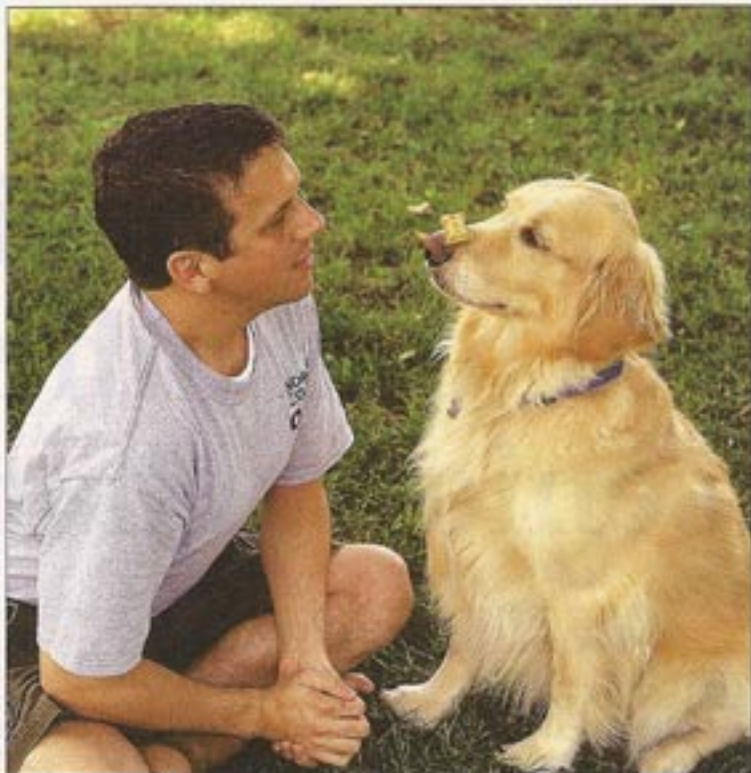
Did what? Turned a passion for dog training into a viable business that includes two learning centers, in-home dog training services, seven trainers and a web site (www.northcoastdogs.com).

When? Mr. Baugh spent time learning the ropes of the business and educating himself before leaving his full-time job as a TV news producer to launch his company. While still working full time in television, he worked for several months as a part-time dog trainer at PetSmart.

North Coast Dogs was established in 2000 and became a limited liability company, or LLC, in July 2001. Mr. Baugh earned the Certification for Pet Dog Trainers designation in 2002, and he is an honors graduate of the San Francisco Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Academy's program for dog trainers.

Mr. Baugh began by conducting workshops in animal hospitals. As the demand for classes increased beyond veterinarians' offices and in home-training, Mr. Baugh opened his first learning center in Brunswick, in a 1,500-square-foot space. When classes gained in popularity, he added a learning center in Lakewood, double the size of the Brunswick space.

The details: "Fortunately I learned the 'who-do-you-know' game from my father, a salesman, who had a knack for networking. He taught me the importance of using one contact to make another," he said. "When North Coast Dogs was in its early stages of development, I knew I had to get the word out there to those professionals who would be most likely to refer clients to me."



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North Coast Dogs' Michael Baugh, with Juno.

Fortunately, Mr. Baugh, a two-time regional Emmy Award winner, is no stranger to the power of the written and electronic word.

Mr. Baugh's passion for dog training evolved during a job stint in St. Louis when he acquired Juno, a golden retriever and began attending training sessions. There Mr. Baugh realized he had an innate ability to communicate with dogs. He also took a look around the classroom, seeing the number of people in attendance, he recognized strong earnings potential.

An offer of a job with WKYC-TV, Channel 3, brought Mr. Baugh to the Cleveland area. With the station's knowledge and support, Mr. Baugh began to pursue his dream of starting a highly professional dog training business that addressed the needs of dog owners and professionals in the city.

"We stumbled a bit at first by marketing to groomers," he said. "However, we soon realized our best recommendations would come from veterinarians."

Like many entrepreneurs, Mr. Baugh realized he needed profes-

sional coaching and leadership assessment firm in Cleveland, to look at future opportunities.

Mr. Lutz worked with Mr. Baugh to develop a strategic plan. However, Mr. Baugh declined to detail the company's financing or give its sales figures.

The Future: The Cleveland Animal Protective League has contracted with North Coast Dogs to lead the development of its new behavior department. The plan's aimed at increasing behavioral care of dogs at the APL and educating adopters about their new family members.

Mr. Baugh hopes to send his company's in-home trainers to San Francisco to attend the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Academy, and he requires all group trainers to take the certified professional dog trainer exam within the next year and a half.

He also plans to bring an eighth professional on board to broaden the scope of services offered.

Meantime, Mr. Baugh is working toward a master's degree in community counseling to support his