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## Dog waste pays off for ex-WNYer

**J**acob D'Aniello is a hit at most cocktail parties.

The former Kenmore resident always gets a chuckle or two when people hear what he does for a living.

D'Aniello, 29, and his wife, Susan, run **DoodyCalls**, a Maryland-based company that franchises pet waste pickup operations in 15 different cities. They are now targeting the Buffalo Niagara area as their latest expansion site. They are part of a wave of former area residents and other people with local ties who are looking at the region for expansion possibilities. Atlanta-based **Wing Zone** also is scouting the area and looking for possible sites.

As for the cocktail party

jokes ...

"I've heard every one of them," D'Aniello said. "People talk to me and they have some sort of release about what they perceive as a taboo subject."

That is, until he tells them just how successful the DoodyCalls franchise operation has become. In just six years, the company has gone from a small, husband-and-wife operation to one with revenues this year expected to exceed \$1 million.

D'Aniello, a pet owner himself, said his idea for a national franchise came from a personal epiphany - looking at how much people spend on Fido and Fluffy.

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals reports that there are 65 million pet dogs in the United States and 40.6 percent of all U.S. households own at least one dog.

Americans spend approximately \$34 billion annually on their pets, a 100 percent growth rate in the past 10 years.

While people love their dogs, picking up after them isn't necessarily their favorite pastime.

That's where D'Aniello comes into the picture.

He was working as a technology consul-

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tant in Maryland but was looking for something else to do with his life. Susan, a nurse, said she had the same feeling.

D'Aniello looked back to his days in Kenmore, where he got up early in the morning to deliver newspapers, worked as a dishwasher and, later, as a valet at **Lombardo's** restaurant on Hertel Avenue.

"What I loved most about those jobs was the ability to work outside and to meet people," he said.

The canine world, even if it means picking up waste, allowed D'Aniello to do just that.

He's the first to admit that it's not a novel idea. He is, however, the first person who is trying to roll out franchised services on a national scale.

It has worked.

DoodyCalls has operations in Boston; Portland, Ore.; and also in the Maryland/Virginia axis around Washington. Coming soon are new operations in Houston and Virginia Beach.

Buffalo will be DoodyCall's first in New York.

"I really like the idea that I am coming home with a business concept," D'Aniello said.

Franchises can be had for as little as \$20,000. With full start-up costs, it can run as much as \$66,670, according to the owners.

What do franchisees get?

They get to tie into a nationally run answering service that handles calls, routing, invoicing and even scheduling.

Individual services run about \$10 per visit, with weekly rates running in the \$14

range. Rates are based on a number of factors including number of dogs, size of the area that needs to be cleaned, frequency and amount of waste.

DoodyCall's clients run the gamut from individual homeowners to apartment and condominium complexes and also municipally owned dog parks.

The company does more than just clean up lawns, though. It can sanitize patios and help repair damaged lawns.

Waste is triplebagged and either hauled away or left for traditional garbage pickup, depending on the client and neighborhood.

Looking back, D'Aniello said he is having the last laugh on those who thought his idea was full of, well, dog waste.

"People thought I was crazy, but you know, people thought the Lawn Doctor was crazy too," he said. "It's funny, because the first time people hear what I do, they laugh. Then they think about it for a while and realize I'm onto something."



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