

Liz Sines, owner of Wash n' Woo of Horsham, Pa., did a more unusual conversion—a custom slip-on truck camper that sits on a Ford F-450. In researching mobile units, only trailers seemed designed to handle the large, big-coated dogs she does, but she wanted something with which she could still pull a camper if she wanted. “It’s convenient to have living space plus the mobile grooming shop at competitions or dog shows,” says Sines.

The conversion wasn’t easy, as the frame had to be custom made by an engineer. The height inside is sufficient (5’, 11”), and the shop utilizes a generator for power. She even has a potty room and a waiting bench just inside the back door.

Anyone undertaking such a conversion will have to also consider the basic equipment that every mobile operation requires. For example, Jeanne Caples, director of operations for Forever Stainless Steel, points out that mobile groomers need a tub that is extremely well constructed and has good welds because of all the stress that will be put on it through traveling. Of course, mobile groomers also have to be very conscious of the amount of water they use, and Forever Stainless Steel tubs have an optional recess for recirculating systems.

“It’s like using a bucket of water to wash the dog instead of filling the whole bottom of the tub. And it allows less shampoo to be used as well,” Caples says.

It is clear why a dog owner would prefer at-the-door service for baths and styling, but what’s in it for the groomer? Besides the lower

overhead, most mobile groomers will tell you it’s all about the flexibility. You can create your own schedule, and there’s no risk of looking under-booked in an unlit shop front. Do your kids have an after-school activity on Tuesday afternoons? Great, book a few dogs for Tuesday morning only. Want to take a week off? Just schedule your appointments around it. Most groomers love that they are working on only one dog at a time, giving it their full attention. Plus, it allows groomers to work on fewer dogs in a day while making the same or more money—not to mention saving wear and tear on your body.

What if you already have a shop? Some salons offer mobile service in addition to a storefront by hiring a groomer for one or the other. Dawn Giovannucci of A Diamond in the Rough in Northborough, Mass., has a successful salon with doggy daycare attached. She recently revamped a mobile van for one of her groomer employees to use.

“In today’s economy, I felt it was important to keep as many income streams as possible engaged,” says Giovannucci. “People are looking for convenience, so why not provide it in as many ways as possible? I plan to add a self-service bath section as well, since each time a client uses one of our services, it provides an opportunity to offer them another.”

Mobile grooming seems to be the epitome of the “work smarter, not harder” ethic. Less dogs, often smaller sized, for more money and the flexibility to live your life the way you want. Whether you create your own ideal wheeled space or have someone do it for you, it seems to be a winning formula. Where do I sign up? [gb](#)

# To Higher Ground

By Jennifer Boncy

**One of the hallmarks of most major U.S. cities is convenience—the grocer, the butcher, the card shop, the pet store and the hair salon can all be found within walking distance of many homes.** That does not mean,

however, that urban consumers see no need for services that spare them the walk and meet them right at their front door. Taria Avery, for one, has proven the point.

In just five years, Avery, owner of Avery’s Pet Styling Salon and Boutique, has built her Philadelphia-based mobile business into a three-van operation with five groomers. About half of the business’ clients are in the city itself, while the other half are in the suburbs. But Avery operates just as comfortably in high-rises and condos as she does in house-lined cul-de-sacs outside



the city proper. “We are proud to serve five of the top 10 best high-style, big luxury condo buildings in Center City Philadelphia, as well.”

There are some unique challenges to mobile grooming in the city. Among them, she says, are “finding parking, dealing with congestion and traffic, making sure that you are adhering to the parking policies and making sure you can stay for the duration of the sessions.”

Avery has systematically faced down

each one of these challenges, however, and she attributes that achievement to careful planning. “We are pretty nimble,” she says.

“We have been doing it for awhile. We have the route down to a science. “I trained all of my staff to go to certain places to park, so they don’t have to spend a lot of time and aggravation in dealing with that. Their job is just to groom, not to worry about congestion and all of that. We have it down to a science. As a result of that, we have been able to capitalize on the opportunity here in the city.”

The company has even established a symbiotic relationship with the management of many of the high-rise buildings that she services, making it easier for Avery’s mobile units to service residents. For example, Avery says, the vans are often allowed to park in buildings’ loading docks, relieving groomers of the dreaded hunt

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for acceptable parking and the fear of getting parking tickets. The trade off is that residents have access to a desirable and premium service that they view as another perk to living in the building.

"A lot of times, the high-end hotel and the high rises will call and say, 'I have a client or resident that just moved in, can you help us out?' From that perspective, we leverage each other," she says.

However, just as the mobile company is adding a third truck and two more employees, Avery is months away from opening up a brick-and-mortar location. The business' debut will be the realization of a long-held goal.

"I remember my initial dream when I first started this," she says. "Notice the name—Avery's Pet Styling Salon and Boutique. We were named that because my initial dream was that we were going to have that huge store front. I have always wanted to have a big building that has grooming, boarding and training, even an academy to help my groomers continue with their education."

The cost and logistics of opening up a storefront seemed cost prohibitive at the onset, leading her to take a slower approach to achieving her dream. "Once you start looking into the cost and the reality of launching something like that you realize quickly that you should start small and grow organically."

Having built up a loyal and trusting clientele, however, Avery now sees a growing demand for additional services. Clients often ask if she can pet sit or request recommendations for other pet professionals who offer related pet services.


"I feel honored that they are asking me, and I feel like they are also holding me accountable to my original mission," she says. "So, now at this point, we are established and we are able to get the funding. We have the track record for what we have already achieved, and this is the time."

A big part of Avery's vision is also inspiring and unifying other groomers and helping to elevate the profession to new heights. For example, Avery has been busy with the newly formed Delaware Valley Pet Care Professionals, a professional network-

ing organization for pet-care industry professionals in the region, which she hopes will serve to offer mutually beneficial relationships within the industry—groomers helping other groomers to become better and more successful.

She says she is equally committed to advancing groomers on her own team. Training, for example, is key to Avery, who

strives to turn even rough-cut diamonds into flawless sparklers.

"If you come to me a diamond in the rough, I will polish you in no time," Avery says. "It's about empowerment and being in a supportive place knowing that you can do it, I am behind you and the team is behind you," she says. "No one moves forward solo. We all need each other." 



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