

# BUSINESS

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**HOWLING SUCCESS:** Dog trainer Steve Brooks and his band, K9 Fusion, offer a soundtrack of the canine life, featuring Brooks' dog, Sven, on the keyboard and vocals. Brooks is one of the exhibitors at SuperZoo, an expo for pet suppliers.

Photographs by GERALDINE WILKINS Los Angeles Times

## Pampered Pets Have Collared the Market

The pet-care industry is flourishing because animal lovers haven't curbed their spending.

By ELIZABETH KELLY  
Times Staff Writer

If the fur and feather-boa canopy beds, lemon rosemary chicken dingers and enameled jewelry on display at the Anaheim Convention Center are any indication, pets are living as well — if not better — than their humans.

Americans shelled out

nearly \$30 billion on pet care last year, more than double what they spent a decade ago, boosting an industry that has shown remarkable resistance during the economic slump. If people are spending less on themselves, the trend doesn't extend to their dogs, cats and fish. And some of what's available for feathered friends is downright deluxe.

"Don't tell anyone," whispered a vendor hawking all-natural bath products at SuperZoo, the 53rd annual pet industry trade show, "but I use the shampoo and conditioner myself."

More than 450 companies from around the world rented booths at the convention center this weekend, hoping to impress an expected 9,000 SuperZoo attendees, most of them independent retailers and distributors.

With more than 100 new exhibitors showing up each year, innovation is key.

"It's a very entrepreneurial industry," said Doug Poindexter, executive vice president of the World Wide Pet Supply Assn., which is the host of the event. "A lot of these products are the result of a pet owner figuring out something for



**JUST FUR IS FLY:** Vickie's, a toy poodle, models the latest in dog grooming.

her pet, seeing people love it and then deciding to market it."

Consider bird lover Vickie  
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## Pet-Care Industry Is Not Begging for Business

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Canepa, who worked as a stunt-woman before launching her North Hollywood business, Fetch-it Pets, three years ago. Her bestselling invention: the Polly Wanna Pinata, a colorful bird toy filled with dried fruit, nuts and seeds.

Canepa was inspired when she saw the reaction of her winged pets when she brought a pinata home. "The birds got to it, and they just tore it apart." Canepa introduced the \$8 Polly Wanna last year at SuperZoo, and sales have tripled since then.

She and others hope to catch the attention of industry giants Petco, which has headquarters in San Diego, and Phoenix-based Petsmart. Petsmart saw revenue increase more than 7% last year to \$2.6 billion, and Petco is hot on its rival's tail, with 2002 revenue of \$1.4 billion, up 13.5%. "Petsmart and Petco are telling us that even though people are losing their jobs and people are becoming more careful with their spending, they have not spent less on their pets," said

Vivian Ma, an analyst at CIBC World Markets in New York.

Today, cats, dogs and other pets are cherished members of 62% of American households, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Assn., a Greenwich, Conn.-based trade group. And although food and veterinary care represent the bulk of pet-care purchases, spending on extras has more than doubled since 2001, from \$97 to \$215 per person annually, according to a study by Unity Marketing, a Stevens, Pa.-based research and consulting firm specializing in luxury markets.

Those extras come in all shapes and sizes at SuperZoo. For the music lovers, dog trainer Steve Brooks from Silver Lake and his band, K9 Fusion, are peddling a CD featuring tunes with Brooks' dog, Sven, on bass, piano and guttural growl.

Los Gatos, Calif.-based Midnight Creations offers protective sun-shading eyewear — called "doggles" — for the pooch that hangs at the beach. Grandma Lucy's of Aliso Viejo accom-



GERALDINE WILKINS Los Angeles Times

**CREATURE COMFORTS:** Tammy and Philip Matthews check out the T-shirts for dogs at the I See Spot booth.

modates the health-conscious pet with sugar-, salt- and preservative-free meatballs; the firm soon will introduce vegetarian and wheat-free versions.

And at the I See Spot booth: clothes for people, including underwear emblazoned with phrases including "I bite" and "puppy love." The Vernon-based

manufacturer also makes dog duds that say, "Does this T-shirt make me look fat?" and "It was the cat, I swear."

Sandy Maroney, the company's owner, said she wanted to get in on the booming pet-care market. "People spend a little bit of money on their pet," she said, "and they are happy."