

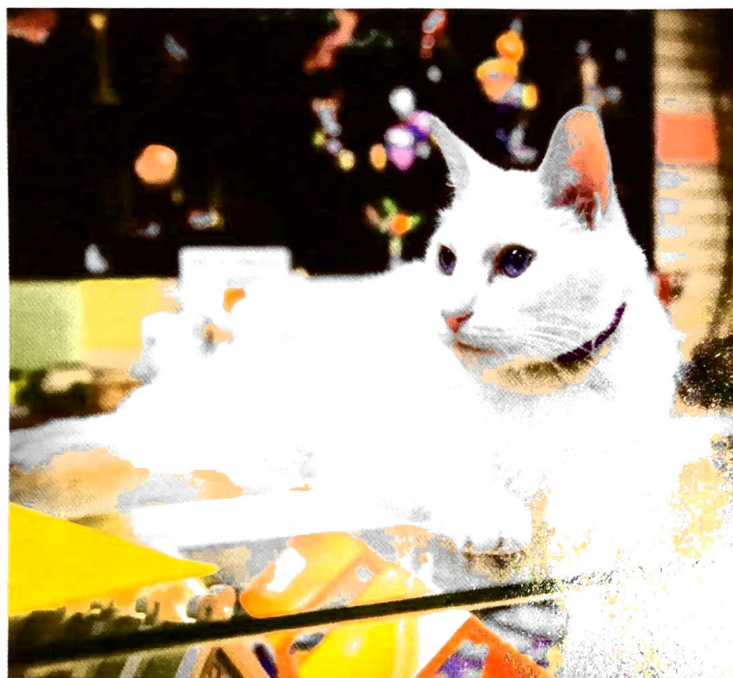
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Service with a smile—and a bark or a meow

At some Rochester-area businesses, pets are part of the operation

By Kate Antoniadis



Star the cat

Although the average retail store in Rochester doesn't allow animals, several area businesses have made pets a central part of daily operations, to the enjoyment of employees and customers alike. We talked to five local businesses with staff members of the furry or feathered variety.

The Bird House

3035 Monroe Ave., Pittsford

Of all the animals you'd expect to find at the Bird House, which sells wild bird supplies, gardening items, bird-themed gifts, and more, a cat isn't one of them. Despite the fact that his feline instincts tell him to chase birds rather than befriend them, a cat named Star lives at the Pittsford shop. In fact, his hunting skills are what brought him to the store. In 2006, the shop was located in a building on the opposite side of Monroe Avenue, and birdseed was stored in the basement. Around the same time that staff decided to adopt a cat to control the resulting rodent problem, Star's owner had reluctantly brought him to Lollypop Farm after the man's son developed cat allergies. Five days after arriving at the shelter, the white cat found a new home at the Bird House.

Star's mouser days are over, but the twelve-year-old cat still finds plenty to do, according to store manager Liz Magnanti, who says, "He loves to nap on top of different birdfeeder displays and on giant stacks of bags of birdseed." (You can see the proof at thebirdhouseny.com/about-us/star.) He also catches catnaps on the main counter and inside shopping baskets. When he's not sleeping, he's usually seeking food or attention, or both. "He's very vocal," says Magnanti. Although once in a while the staff need to put him in a back room if a customer with severe cat allergies comes in, Magnanti says that Star is, well, a star. "People come in just to see the cat," she says, "and then we have customers who bring their kids in and their kids run into the store to see the cat—their parents are always trailing behind."



Trevor the Shiba Inu

Comella Orthodontics

1972 S. Clinton Ave., Brighton

171 W. Main St., Victor

Visitors to the Comella Orthodontics website will find a photo of Dr. Brandon Comella's smiling staff on the "Meet the Team" page, including the treatment coordinator, clinical assistants, and others who help patients at the ten-year-old practice. Right in the middle is "office manager" Trevor, who happens to be a Shiba Inu. "He became a symbol of Comella completely unintentionally," says Catrina Iorio, who handles public relations. When Trevor was a puppy, Comella kept him in his office rather than leave him home alone, and people were curious about the new arrival. "We started bringing him out, and everybody loved it and went nuts," says Iorio. "Now he just roams around the office."

Resident greeter Trevor, who's now ten, has the right temperament for a busy orthodontic office. "He is very friendly and mellow," says Iorio. "He loves the attention." And "attention" is an understatement. Patients take photos with Trevor, give him treats and toys, and even bring their own dogs to meet him. "Everyone is very excited to see him even though they've seen him a hundred times," says Iorio. "It brings some joy and excitement to people."

Beyond the novelty of a dog at the orthodontist, Trevor's presence at the two Comella offices also helps kids who are nervous about their treatment—and it's clear he's glad they're there, too. "If there's a consultation, he scratches at the door, and they'll let him in," says Iorio. "He just makes himself at home."

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Sarge and Rio the macaws

Bristol's Garden Center 7454 Victor-Pittsford Rd., Victor

The tropical plant department at Bristol's Garden Center isn't the only feature that lends a hint of the rainforest. The retailer is also home to two macaws, members of the parrot family. Rio, who's ten years old, spent his first year living with the Sannas, the family who owns the nursery, but they soon brought him to Bristol's so he wouldn't have to be home alone. Sarge, who is seventeen, joined Rio after her owner moved abroad and couldn't bring her along.

Although they're both macaws, the birds' personalities are very different, says office manager Mickie Sanna, whose father, Steve, co-owns Bristol's. Sarge, the blue female, loves to show off for customers. She's talkative and outgoing and gets jealous if one of her favorite people doesn't pay her enough attention. Rio, the red male, is quieter and more reserved, although he's been learning new words from Sarge. They hang out during the day in a ceiling-height, twenty-foot-wide cage where they chew on toys, climb, swing from ropes, keep an eye on customers, and squawk. Loudly. "They have scared some of the younger kids with their squawks," says Sanna. "But once they see Sarge dance or Rio hang from his beak, they stop being afraid and are fascinated by them." The large cage holds two smaller ones where the birds spend the night.

Fans of the macaws make sure to stop by while they're shopping, and some bring their kids to visit when they happen to be in the area. "Both birds have made their way around Facebook and Instagram," says Sanna. "They get their pictures taken daily by customers."

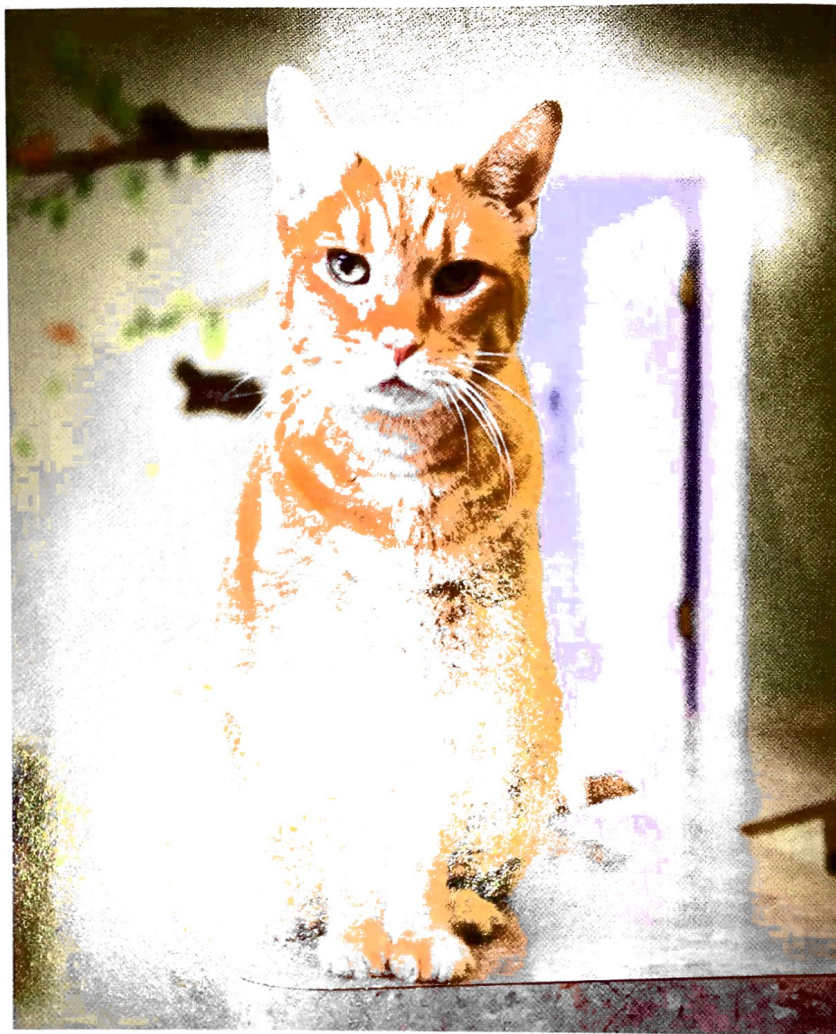
Cats & Critters

32 Somerton St., Rochester

Many cats hate going to the vet, but not Sammy. In fact, for all of his seventeen years he's been living at Cats & Critters, a Monroe Veterinary Associates (MVA) member practice for cats and small animals. As customer service supervisor Victoria Johnson explains, he was found as a stray at eight weeks old and brought to the Animal Hospital of Pittsford, after which Dr. Ember Couture (who works at Cats & Critters with Drs. Joanne Hach and Christopher McKinney) brought him to his current home to be the resident cat.

Since then Sammy has enjoyed his fifteen minutes of fame and then some. His photo has appeared in both the *Democrat & Chronicle* and a magazine for veterinary technicians, and the profile picture on the Cats & Critters Facebook page shows his friendly face. He even once "wrote" a letter to a local radio station that led to a free lunch for the entire staff. Because of his friendly, laid-back personality, he also serves as the demo cat when staff show clients how to give a cat a pill or an injection and helps Johnson train MVA staff in cat behavior and restraint. Cats & Critters visitors are always petting him, and Johnson says some bring him cat treats.

You'll often find Sammy lying in the sun underneath the skylight, begging staff for treats at the front desk, and visiting with feline patients, which includes peeking into their carriers (although staff don't let him interact with those who don't like other cats). "If they're crying in distress, he'll get upset," Johnson says. "If a person's really sad, he sometimes comes over, too. And he follows me around everywhere—but he likes everyone." Sammy also has a habit of climbing onto people's shoulders, says Johnson. "He'll get on random people all the time."



Sammy the cat



Scout the Labrador Retriever

Weiders Paint & Hardware

1800 Monroe Ave., Brighton

166 West Main St., Honeoye Falls

The Labrador Retriever who greets customers at Weiders Paint & Hardware in Honeoye Falls was originally meant to have a very different job. The yellow Lab named Scout was bred to be a guide dog for the blind, and store owners Ned and Lisa Green cared for her as volunteer puppy raisers for the Upstate Guide Dog Association. To help prepare Scout for her future role, they often brought her to spend time at the store. After a year with the Greens, Scout completed six months of special training, but she was "a little too spunky to be a guide dog," says Lisa Green. "Her goal in life is to play." She and her husband paid an adoption fee to adopt Scout themselves.

At thirteen, Scout is calmer than she used to be, which makes her a good store mascot. "She's such a people dog," says Green. "She follows people around the store. It's usually people who have dogs—I think she can tell." Scout is most often at the Honeoye Falls location, but customers can also get their canine fix at the Brighton store, where an employee sometimes brings her cocker spaniel, Lilly.

Scout's favorite things at Weiders are the dog treats in the pet supply section and the popcorn machine. Customers often ask if they can buy her a treat, and she also takes matters into her own hands—er, paws. "Every once in a while, she'll put a treat in her mouth and go up to my husband and say 'can I have this?' which is really cute," says Green. As for the popcorn, one of her favorite foods, Green says there's no need to sweep up when Scout's around: "She'll clean the floor for you." (585)

Kate Antoniadis is a freelance writer/editor whose main gig is serving as editor of the blog Corporette. A Rochester native, she lives in Brighton with her husband, son, and four cats.