

J and J Dog Supplies

Family owned businesses like the families themselves, go through many transitions as the founders and their children mature. Some businesses never survive into the second generation, but J and J Dog Supplies in Galesburg Illinois is an exception. The company founded in 1965 by Jack Godsil and a partner, is a privately held dog training equipment manufacturer and supplier. Jack Godsil, according to his son Mark, was “one of the top dog obedience competitors in the nation.” People in the competition circuit wanted to know where he bought his equipment, so the elder Mr. Godsil saw a need to design a line of quality leashes for the sport. The company’s initial product was a 6-foot long hand braided leather dog-training leash, and it is still one of the mainstays of the business.

Mr. Godsil’s son Mark became involved in the company as a teenager and bought out his father’s partner at age 15 he said, and “worked at this all through high school. I sold my half to another family friend when I went into the Navy in 1975. Both my father and the other man were killed together in an auto accident in 1978. My mother used the insurance settlement to buy back the other half, and my older brother Mike, recently out of college, came back home to help out and run things.”

Six years later, Mark Godsil retired from the Navy and started another company. “I was selling some items to J and J and helping my brother until eventually we merged things and I again owned part of the company” Mr. Godsil added. “In January 2001, I did a buy out of both my brothers, the younger one Matt, had a minority interest. Since that point I have owned 100 % of the company” Mr. Godsil explained.

J and J Dog Supplies is just one of several companies that Mr. Godsil owns. An avid conservationist, he owns over 500 acres, much of which has been converted back into forest, wetlands and other conservation practices. Other ventures include a metal fabrication shop, national fulfillment center, a custom woodworking shop and an advertising and promotion company. Mr. Godsil is a true entrepreneur, as he has never worked for anyone other than himself since leaving the Navy.

“In the dog training market, we are the biggest in the country, and have been for a number of years” he remarked. “Although still growing, it becomes harder every year since we already have such a large share of the market” he explained. After almost 40 years, J and J Dog Supply (www.jjdog.com) has become a worldwide importer, exporter, manufacturer and retailer, and sells its products from its web site, a print catalogue and through mail order.

“The only real options for expansion were to branch out more, but I did not want to go into the general dog market. We have always been successful in the niche market with good service, lower volumes but higher margins” noted Mr. Godsil. J and J Dog Supplies has sales of \$3.5 million and employs more than 25 people in Galesburg. “With any luck” Mr. Godsil added “we will go over \$4 million for 2004.”

Today J and J Dog Supplies stocks over 1000 dog products including toys, agility equipment, training aids, books and videos. Most of the agility equipment they sell is made at their Galesburg facility. Since the company’s start in 1965, it has grown consistently. The largest expansion from 3,500 square feet to its current 42,000 square feet facility occurred in 1988.

J and J Dog Supplies markets to their customers through a network of for-profit and non-profit outlets including dog shows and competitions, breed clubs, dog trainers and obedience schools. The company’s 96-page color catalogue is distributed at most dog obedience events. They maintain an extensive mailing list and print over 50,000 catalogues each year and 100,000 seasonal flyers. Mr. Godsil explained “we ship over 99% of all customer orders received by 2:00PM, the same day with an almost non-existent back-order rate.”

In 2001, the company participated in a trade mission to Canada with the Illinois Trade Office of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Jim Foley, director of the Bradley University Small Business Development Center International Trade Center, explained that “this unique event is a matchmaker between small and mid size Illinois companies looking for Canadian distribution and Canadian organizations of similar scale looking for innovative, new Illinois products.” During the event Mr. Foley said, J and J Dog Supplies “generated sales leads, agent/distributors leads and possible joint venture opportunities. These leads resulted in J and J Dog Supplies products being prominently featured in The Pet Supply House catalogue which is Canada’s premier mail order pet supply provider.”

Mr. Godsil said “about 20% of all of our sales are exports, mostly to Japan where there is a highly organized competitive dog sport scene.” Most recently, he worked with Jim Foley again of the Bradley SBDC to create a new business in a different area of pet supplies.

As sole owner of the J and J Dog Supplies, Mr. Godsil has been thinking about his transition from the company. He does not want to sell the firm to a competitor, and would prefer to sell to his employees, when the time comes. He is currently investigating an Employee Stock Option Plan (ESOP) and expanding the current profit sharing system.

The Bradley University International Trade Center is part of the Bradley University Small Business Development Center, which is a member of the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network. The Network works in partnership with the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the U.S. Small Business Administration.