

MANICURES AND SPAS PAMPER TODAY'S FAMILY PETS

Pets and Owners Even Exchanging Greeting Cards These Days

CLEVELAND, Ohio (June 25, 2002) – When was the last time you went to a spa? Or had a pedicure or massage? If your name is Fluffy or Rover, it may have been last week. From pet spas to gourmet food, today's pet owners are treating their furry friends like members of their family – sometimes even better.

Caring for our pets isn't just about flea baths anymore. Changing lifestyles -- like couples waiting until later in life to have children and the empty nest syndrome -- have made furry creatures more important in American culture. The growing custom of treating pets as members of the family has not been lost on card company American Greetings.

"Our new 'For the Love of Pets' card line was developed to address this trend. These are cards for people who are passionate about their pets, so you won't see photo manipulation or googly eyes glued to the card," said Tina Elkins, photo stylist at American Greetings.

Elkins, who spends her days trying to get puppies and kittens to say "cheese," adds: "People adore seeing pets 'caught' doing what they do naturally, so we visit homes, take pets out to play and concentrate on capturing their natural beauty and personality."

Among the card choices are birthday wishes "to" and "from" the family cat and dog, thank you for pet sitting, miss you, friendship... even encouragement from the pet! For example, one card shows a sweet cat on the front with the inside message: "Hope you'll be feeling frisky again soon." After all, some studies have shown pets do a great deal to soothe our psyche, and can even lower blood pressure... So why wouldn't they want to send their favorite humans a card?

Additionally, in an age where pet tombstones adorn gardens and Web sites feature poems dedicated to the memory of beloved family cats and dogs, this new greeting card line's pet sympathy cards fill a very real need. In fact, for many owners, grief over the loss of a pet is every bit as deep as the grief over the death of any loved one. Research shows many Americans view their canine and feline companions as "children." A recent survey showed 85 percent of pet owners consider themselves "Mom" or "Dad" to their cat or dog.

It is expected that the "For the Love of Pets" line will see many signatures from man's best friends. American Greetings found that 62 percent of pet owners sign their greeting cards with their furry one's name, and some even add paw prints! These "animal moms and dads" are also buying birthday and holiday gifts. Last year, Americans spent an estimated \$29 billion on their pets, up from \$17 billion in 1994.

"People treat their pets differently today than they used to," agreed Dean Koester, owner of Inn to Pets, a kennel in Westlake, Ohio, that is more like a Ritz Carlton for pets. "And these days, that's nothing to be embarrassed about."

Inn to Pets is just one of many resort accommodations popping up across the country for animals. A stay includes daily fresh linens for dogs and biscuits on their pillows. Several of the suites have TVs in the rooms and guests are bathed and pampered in spas that include fabulous pedicures. No worries about boredom here! The "Kitty City" wing boasts deluxe, fully outfitted kitty condos with spectacular, panoramic views overlooking birdfeeders.

"Our pets love us unconditionally," said Koester. "People today don't feel as bad spoiling their pet when their pets give so much to them in return."

Even if you're not into indulging your pet at a spa, chances are, you may have taken it along on vacation. American Greetings research shows that 68 percent of owners are taking trips with their pets. More and more hotels are accommodating the creatures, even if they haven't yet added canned dog and cat food to their continental breakfasts!

Need more proof of just how important our pets are to us? American Greetings found that almost 75 percent of married pet owners say "hello" to their pets before their spouses when they arrive home from work! So it really should come as no surprise that "For the Love of Pets" was developed to provide owners and pets with one more way to express their mutual affection!

American Greetings Corporation (NYSE: AM) is the world's largest publicly held creator, manufacturer and distributor of greeting cards and social expression products. Its staff of artists, designers and writers comprises one of the largest creative departments in the world and helps consumers "say it best" by supplying more than 15,000 greeting card designs to retail outlets in nearly every English-speaking country. Located in Cleveland, Ohio, American Greetings has annual sales of more than \$2.5 billion. For more information on the company, visit <http://www.americangreetings.com> on the World Wide Web.

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