

GROOMING

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profound experience for me.”

Louche went through the 12-week program and immediately took a job at a large pet store. The pay wasn't very good and the pace was very fast. She still wasn't happy, and when she next spoke with West Paw owner Nancy Burns, she expressed her frustration.

Burns replied with a job offer as a mobile groomer.

Louche has now been working as a mobile groomer traveling throughout San Bernardino County for about 13 months.

“I've been happy ever since,” she said. “The part-time work acts as a supplementary life for me and I have this great quality of life.”

Judy Smithson, of Riverside, worked for Smart & Final as a DPI West sales representative. She made a nice salary with good benefits. But she wasn't really happy. She enjoyed her clients, but the fast-paced sales environment was wearing her down.

“I always wanted to be a groomer, but I was afraid to do it,” Smithson said. “So I went into the grocery business like my dad.”

A few years back she decided to take the leap and enrolled at West Paw when it was at its previous San Bernardino location. She recalls that students in her class came from a variety of backgrounds, including a stockbroker.

She completed the school and has now run her own successful mobile grooming business for about four years.

“I got married, bought a house and started the business in the same year,” she said. “But it took off right away. I'm very busy.”

Smithson's husband is in construction, which has been slow since the economic downturn of the past several years.

“He's worked for me occasionally,” Smithson said.

Even during times of eco-

omic turmoil, most people still care for their animals, she added.

Burns said she has seen hundreds of students from varying career backgrounds during her 28 years of training.

“I had one with a business degree who worked for an attorney, a mother and daughter team who worked at a correctional facility ... another was laid off from retail management,” Burns said.

Burns has many testimonial letters posted on the West Paw website, and a large portion of them talk of unemployment, an unsuccessful job search and finally

the positive impact of the job training.

Some chose to start their own business, some found jobs for groomers or “doggy daycares.”

Most at least had a place to start at the end of training.

“I'm really happy about that,” Burns said of the high job placement rate. “They go out and they find their niche in life. I went to dog grooming school years ago at age 35, and I've never looked back since.”

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