

For one start-up, every dog has its day



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TRICKS OF THE TRADE

From finance to Fido, Elena Gretch's foray into the world of pet care is unconventional. Her prelude to launching her own pet services company, It's a Dog's Life, involved a business school education and a hard and fast eight years working at the American Stock Exchange trading derivatives. Then in 2004, six months after she and her husband became first-time pet owners, the 32-year-old discovered a new professional calling - to be a stay-at-home mom for her Portuguese water dog and dive into the \$40 billion pet care industry. "We had this hard-core New York City life. With our schedules it was

impossible to service all the needs we had. Having a dog was the first time I had perspective of my lifestyle and it inspired us to work for animals," Gretch said. She initially started the business with the simple premise of offering a dog walking service. "But then I set out to become better educated and studied dog training and animal behavior," Gretch said. In 2006, she became a Certified Pet Dog Trainer (CPDT) - one of just 21 in Manhattan. Today, It's a Dog's Life (itsadogslifenewyork.com) has evolved, offering private dog walking, exercise sessions and overnight care for the city's dogs and cats. Gretch and her nine trained staff members now service some 75 clients in various neighborhoods. Private dog walking runs \$38 an hour, while a one-hour training session costs \$150. Gretch said she charges slightly higher rates than the average dog walker because of the level of personalized attention and employee expertise. Pet owners in New York are also more accustomed to spending big bucks on

their animals these days. Through her own studies, Gretch discovered that the average pet owner in Manhattan spends \$7,000 a year on pet services. The number one training lesson for a young New York City dog? "Social skills," Gretch said. For new puppy owners, Gretch recommends they take their pups outside to become familiar with the air and to meet children and other dogs. She understands this is a modern approach and not one traditional pet experts may suggest. "Veterinarians sometimes say not to take out dogs until they have all their shots," Gretch said. "But the amount of sociability that's given up can have lasting effects on a dog's behavioral development."



Elena Gretch, owner of "It's a Dog Life" walking her dogs in Manhattan.
(Erin Gleeson)