

# Striking it lucky

Organic dog biscuit-maker grows business from scratch

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By JOHN SAMMON

newsroom@santacruzsentinel.com

WATSONVILLE — Ron Borden built a dog biscuit business from scratch with no capital during a bad economy and with no previous experience, while enduring everything from slurs against dog food to women pushing reluctant babies in his face when he dressed in a dog suit.

“Sometimes when I wear the dog suit at crafts shows and street fairs,” he said, “other dogs, real dogs, are afraid of me and growl. Sometimes women with little infants in their arms think I’m cute and come over and push their baby in my face. The kid is terrified and crying.”

Borden conceded it’s all part of building a business.

He founded Lucky Dogs Bakery in 2009, when after 20 years as a landscape contractor his job ended in a souring economy. Borden had always liked to cook and enrolled at the San Francisco Baking Institute. He came up with the idea of making an organic, gourmet dog food biscuit and named the company for his dog, Lucky, now 4 years old.

Certified as an organic baker, Borden rented baking ovens and baked by night, driving around Santa Cruz in a truck by day, selling the biscuits to local stores accompanied by Lucky. The unique taste of the biscuits, free of any preservatives, immediately won favor.

“Today I’m in about 120 independent pet and grocery stores,” he said. “I’ve got my dog biscuits in Whole Foods Markets, 12 outlets from Santa Cruz to San Francisco, also Pet Food Express, New Leaf Market, Pet Pals and Apto Feed.”

Borden said he doesn’t take Lucky to the shows because the dog gets jealous of his giving samples to passers-by. Instead, Borden wears a dog suit he bought for \$2,500 including paws, tail, feet, and a head with a chef’s hat. But he said he has to be careful wearing the suit.

“When I put the suit on people often come up and want to hug me and take pictures,” he said. “But they don’t order biscuits. It can hurt sales.”

Now people recognize him in the suit and call him “Lucky” like his dog.

Borden said he’s grown the business, but not enough yet to make a living. He keeps it going using credit cards with debt totaling the price of a small Mercedes, he said.

“I’m a one-person shop working seven days a week, 18 hours a day,” he said. “I’m baking from 4:30 in the afternoon until 1:30 in the morning, then selling and delivering the product or shipping it UPS, mailing samples or brochures, which means I don’t have extra time to generate more sales.”

His hot sellers continue to be the peanut butter flavor, organic chicken liver and the Lucky Snap, a ginger-snap flavor with sweet potato and molasses. The biscuits are usually priced \$8.95 to \$9.95 for a bag with 70 biscuits. A 2-pound tub with 140 biscuits is available and a 5-pound with 150.

A new addition will be a grain-free biscuit.

Borden said he sometimes encounters people who have a prejudice about dog food.

“They act like it’s nuclear waste, but it’s just an organic cookie,” he said.



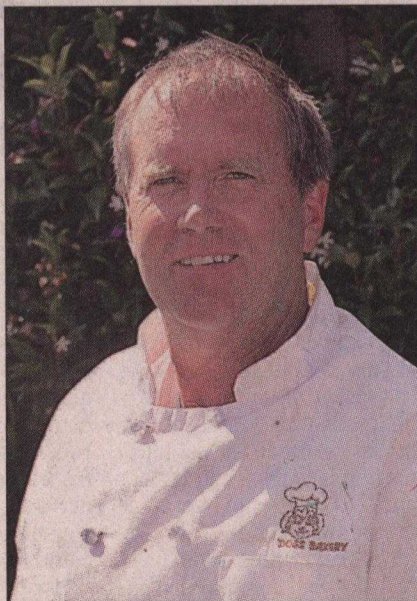
“Why wouldn’t you eat what your dog eats? I taste my dog’s food.”

Despite the difficulties, Borden said he remains committed to the business. He credits his wife Noni for her support in keeping him going.

“If enough people ordered just one bag of biscuits, or Oprah Winfrey or Ellen DeGeneres on TV mentioned them, it would put me over the top,” he said.

**ABOVE:** Ron Borden gets dressed as a dog wearing a chef’s hat on the weekends to pitch his dog biscuits.

**RIGHT:** Ron Borden runs Lucky Dogs Bakery, named for his dog Lucky, from his Watsonville garage.



## AT A GLANCE

LUCKY DOGS BAKERY

**OWNER:** Ron Borden  
**PRODUCT:** Gourmet organic dog biscuit made without preservatives  
**COST:** \$8.95 to \$9.95 per bag of 70 biscuits at area stores, including Whole Foods  
**INFORMATION:** Lucky Dogs biscuits are available for sale at [www.luckydogsbakery.com](http://www.luckydogsbakery.com) or call 722-3600.