

The Lure's Allure

FLORIDA WOMAN'S LURE COURSING INNOVATION PROVIDES EXERCISE FOR DOGS—AND A LARGER CALLING

BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN



MEGHAN WOLFGRAM ADORES PETS. “I love everything about pets,” she says. “They make our lives better, and in turn I find myself always thinking about how I can give my pets the best, most fulfilling lives possible.”

She’s not the only one. According to the American Pet Products Association, during 2023, \$143.6 billion in sales were projected for Fidos and Fifis. And about 65 million American homes own dogs. One group on Facebook (Canine Enrichment Ideas), with over 390,000 members, is solely dedicated to sharing enrichment ideas and inspiration.

Wolfgram, the founder of the pet lure invention SwiftPaws in Melbourne, Florida, says there are three core pillars in pet care: nutrition, health care and enrichment.

She defines enrichment as “anything that engages your pet mentally or physically. It’s what you do *with* and *for* your pet to satisfy their desires, drives and natural instincts.”

She summarizes enrichment as the PlayWell movement—which espouses the importance of play for people and pets. To play well is to conscientiously provide healthy outlets for a pet’s energy.

PlayWell also promotes stronger bonds with your pet, resulting in their being happy and healthy. And nothing makes Wolfgram happier than to see her pets happy.

A proven sport

Wolfgram founded SwiftPaws in 2012 after discovering the sport of lure coursing and realizing there was no access to this kind of activity for people and pets in her area.

Lure coursing has been around since the 1970s as a method of allowing sighthounds (greyhound, whippet, borzoi and other similar breeds) to use their natural instincts to chase and hunt by sight without hunting live game. It ensures dogs stay in a defined area, with the mechanical lure zipping around a predetermined course. This allowed a

sport to emerge in which dogs could be judged based on a set of criteria and race to be crowned “top dog.”

Think of a lure coursing system as something like a clothesline: a series of pulleys with a string going around each pulley, forming a closed loop so when you tie a flag, or “lure,” to the line. The flag zips around the course with the help of a single motorized pulley that controls speed and direction.

Wolfgram initially “invented” SwiftPaws because of her desire to offer this fun, enriching product to pet professionals—who could then share it with their own communities. Years later, she realized there was a huge demand for an at-home, backyard version that people could buy for their personal use.

Community commitment

She did not start digging into market data until years later, while developing a consumer version of the product.

Initially, she intended to make machines for professionals such as dog trainers and doggie day cares. She envisioned a world where anyone with a dog that liked to chase would have access to a local SwiftPaws course to provide a healthy, controlled outlet for energy instead of, say, chasing the cat!

Wolfgram says because SwiftPaws has always been a community-driven business, it has the incredible opportunity to grow and pivot to suit a community’s needs. When people kept mentioning how badly they needed a lure coursing kit for their backyard, they made one.

After seeing SwiftPaws on “Shark Tank” in 2022, potential customers shared how much they knew their dogs would love

Although kits are the foundation of the brand, SwiftPaws is also dedicated to offering a growing selection of other products to help you “PlayWell” with your pets.



it but how the (then-current) product was out of their price range. Because of that feedback, the company launched its newest, most affordable version, Chase, for pre-order on the April 8 anniversary of the “Shark Tank airing.” With the help of over 1,000 pre-order customers, the product was brought to life and shipped in time for the holidays that year.

As a pet-centric business, every piece of the SwiftPaws puzzle has been put in place with pets in mind—from a pet-friendly office and warehouse where Wolfgram’s team gets to bring their pets to work every day to the company’s amazing relationships with shelters and rescues

where they get to help the organizations that help pets in need.

SwiftPaws has blossomed into a rapidly growing brand that hasn’t lost sight of what’s most important: the health and well-being of everyone’s pets.

No slips, no errors

The common expression is, “necessity is the mother of invention.” In Wolfgram’s case, necessity, and a little bit of tedium, were her inspirations.

The first lure coursing machine she made, with the help of her dad, had traditional pulleys

Meghan Wolfgram remembers thinking, “Surely, something like this had been done before.” It had not.



that were open spinning wheels. Unfortunately, this meant that the line could easily slip off a pulley, causing Wolfgram to have to walk all the way out to the pulley to re-seat the line—sometimes as far as a thousand feet away. After having to do this multiple times per event, she thought there must be a better way.

After much trial and error, the result was a design that incorporated a housing for the pulley that ensured the line stayed in place. It also included a large window that could accommodate the lure as it went around each pulley and through the machine itself.

She remembers thinking, “Surely, something like this had been done before.” It had not. That ultimately became her first patented invention.

That’s the ticket!

Wolfgram says “Shark Tank” was a magical, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for her and SwiftPaws. The process felt like a blur; before she knew it, she was in Los Angeles with her dog Piper, pitching to the “Sharks.”

She was hoping for some sort of deal when Lori Greiner offered her the “Golden Ticket”—a pendant made of real gold that Greiner only offers to one entrepreneur per season, if at all. This is Greiner’s way of confirming her belief that the entrepreneur has something special, and that she believes in the person and the brand. With this distinction, Greiner offers a company exactly what it wants with no negotiation.

“I took Lori up on her offer faster than my dog can get to a piece of food dropped on the floor!” Wolfgram says. Through tears of joy, she told Greiner that together they were going to make so many dogs happy.

Groundswell Startups, the nonprofit startup incubator SwiftPaws has belonged to since 2019, hosted a watch party that evening for over 100 of Wolfgram’s family and closest friends. Brevard County is her hometown (she has deep roots in the area), and even her eighth-grade teacher came to cheer her on.

The PlayWell purpose

Today, SwiftPaws offers a family of lure coursing kits ranging from the Chase version all the way up to its pro-grade machine, which can be seen



\$25K SALUTE

Eight days into the new year, SwiftPaws got a \$25,000 boost when it was named one of five startup winners in Purina’s eighth annual Pet Care Innovation Prize.

Nearly 150 companies from around the world applied for the prize. This year’s field included pet enrichment toys, a toothbrush designed specifically for a cat’s anatomy, alternative protein and allergy-friendly pet treats and food, a game-changing microchip that monitors pet health from the inside, and a platform to help organizations provide foster care for pets.

running many events and competitions across the country. These include on ESPN, where it powers the American Kennel Club’s “Fastest Dogs USA” competition each year.

Although the kits are the foundation of the brand, SwiftPaws is also dedicated to offering a growing selection of other products to help you “PlayWell” with your pets. They include flirt poles, critter packs and surprise toys that your pet gets to unwrap.

This year, the company is launching the PlayWell initiative to educate and give back to the community. The initiative includes collaborating with other like-minded pet brands dedicated to enriching the lives of pets; sharing stories from pet parents who are finding creative ways to add playing well into their pet’s lives; and hosting conversations with pet professionals and



ORo Dog Companion Robot



Doggy Bathroom

MORE DOGGED INNOVATION

A 21st-century automated parent for canines. A fancy doggie “whizatorium.” Check out the latest in inventions for dogs:

ORo Dog Companion Robot

Showcased at this year’s Consumer Electronics Show, ORo provides a kind of pet parenting when the dog’s owners are away by navigating the home, enriching play, feeding, managing routines, and keeping watch by using cameras and sensors. The robot, built with advanced AI, is fitted with two-way audio and a video screen so you can interact with your dog remotely.

A built-in dispenser launches treats for your dog on your command. A separate automatic food bowl releases food on schedule, or on command if you’re away during your pet’s regular feeding time. Games range from virtual fetch to active rolling balls.

ORo also aims to learn your dog’s behavior patterns and react with soothing music or physical interaction when it senses distress, restlessness or the desire to play. orobuddy.com

Doggy Bathroom

This modern-looking product purports to be “the only dog litter box that keeps everything in one, easy-to-clean space with vertical pee pads, including dogs who [sic] lift their leg.”

Per wired.com: “The Doggy Bathroom includes a white bin, a base that comes in four colors, and two removable rails. You also get 50 pads, three mats, and six clips. Once you connect the main bin to the base and attach the side rails, you’ll

want to grab clips and four of the pads. From there, stick a pad to the bottom of the bin, and use the clips to secure your other pads to each side of the wall. Place the mat outside of the bin, and voilà! Your dog has its own little private bathroom.”

The concept is that the dog walks into the bin (or is placed in there), does its business, then walks out onto the mat. The high walls should catch any rogue spray if the dog lifts its leg; the mat should keep paws clean and dry. Then the pads go in the trash.

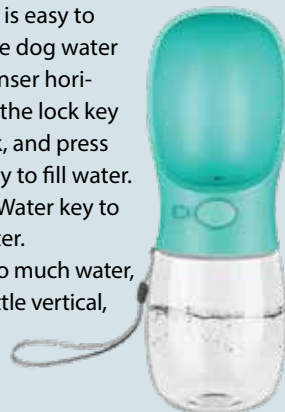
The brand features a Doggy Bathroom x Keith Haring special edition, a curated selection with some of Haring’s classic icons. doggybathroom.com

Kalimdor Dog Water Bottle

More accurately, it’s a leak-proof, portable puppy water dispenser with a drinking feeder for when you’re outdoors with your dog.

Made of food-grade plastic (don’t put it in the dishwasher or microwave), the water bottle is easy to use: Keep the dog water bottle dispenser horizontal, slide the lock key up to unlock, and press the water key to fill water. Release the Water key to stop the water.

If that’s too much water, keep the bottle vertical, and press



the water key to let water flow back. After feeding, slide the lock key down to lock and prevent water leakage.

The product has received an overall 4.6 stars out of a maximum 5 on amazon.com. Look it up there.

Halo Wireless Dog Fence and GPS Dog Collar

The company calls its product “the most accurate GPS dog fence ever created.” It features advanced real-time GPS tracking and activity monitoring—all managed through the Halo app.



This is not a shock collar, which some experts say can have negative effects on dogs. Instead, it provides “warning feedback” via a beep once your dog approaches the edge of the fence; “boundary feedback” that is a vibration if the dog ignores the warning beep; and “emergency feedback”—a painless static pulse that feels like being tapped on the shoulder.

There is also a Return Whistle that lets you call your dog to safety directly from the app, using customizable audio cues; and a built-in dog activity tracker that shows what your dog is up to any time of day. Daily activity charts show you how much time each day your dog has spent in safe areas, on walks, active versus resting, and more.

Technological advancements include PrecisionGPS and an active GPS antenna. halocollar.com

PetSafe Automatic Ball Launcher

This water-resistant toy works best with standard-size tennis balls. It comes with two and can hold three at a time. Adjust how far the ball is thrown with nine distance settings and six angle settings that launch the ball from 8 to 30 feet.



Electronic motion sensors detect if your pet is within 7 feet of the dog ball launcher hole and won't launch a ball until your dog moves further away or to the side, out of view of the motion sensor. An audible tone signals when a ball is about to be thrown.

The toy will enter an automatic sleep mode after 30 minutes of playtime to give your dog 15 minutes to rest. You can use the included power adaptor or six D batteries, not included. petsafe.com/product/automatic-ball-launcher

Allergy Test My Pet

With this purportedly easy-to-read report, learn whether your dog has food intolerances; environmental sensitivities; is subject to household allergens, and more. Care tips are also provided.

The test was developed to measure about 100 of the most common allergens to which your pet may react. You also learn which popular supplements and other factors may be causing your pet to react.

According to the product developers: "Often times the easiest solution to insensitivities in pets is to use medicated shampoos, expensive dog foods and prescription drugs. While all of these things may be helpful, they are only masking the problem and not getting to the cause of it. ...

"We advocate discovering the cause of your pet's sensitivities and learning which foods and products are best for your pet—and which to avoid." atmypet.com



When offered a no-negotiation, Golden Ticket on "Shark Tank," "I took Lori (Greiner) up on her offer faster than my dog can get to a piece of food dropped on the floor!"

industry experts about the evolving landscape of pet care, the importance of enrichment, and why more pet parents are seeking to add a variety of enrichment to their pets' daily activities.

Wolfgram wants to be more than an American manufacturer of lure coursing kits. She can't think of a more meaningful way to do that than by fostering conversations centered around how everyone can help their pets live their best, most fulfilled lives.

When she's not working on her business, she enjoys reading and spending time with friends, family, and—of course—pets.

Asked for advice for prospective pet product inventors, she says, "Go for it! Don't be afraid to put your idea out there into the world, and don't be afraid to utilize the multitude of resources that are available to inventors, entrepreneurs and business owners—like the USPTO's Resource Centers and their amazing librarians who are a wealth of knowledge when it comes to learning more about intellectual property." 🐾

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Mario runs a SwiftPaws course;
Photo by Run, Wag, Learn
(@runwaglearn)

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Inventors

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BOW-WOW FACTOR

LATEST INNOVATION FOR DOGS



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