

Colleen
McDonough

Barks and Blooms



Colleen & Dorothy

Setting the Standard... and Loving it!

A Dog Lover's Dreams Come True

Colleen McDonough is living proof that you can accomplish anything if you put your mind to it, and it's never too late in life to do so. Colleen always wanted to have a kennel and save all the dogs in the world! So at 43 years old, she left the corporate world behind in pursuit of her dream. She is now the proud owner of Barks and Blooms, a professional and fast growing pet sitting and dog walking business based out of her home in Baldwin, Maryland. With three managers, twenty-nine dog walkers and a client base expanding daily, Barks and Blooms has quickly earned a reputation for excellence throughout Harford, Baltimore and Carroll Counties.

The rapid success and solid reputation can be attributed to Colleen's keen acumen and business sense from eighteen years in corporate sales and management.

Colleen put all that she learned in the corporate world to the test in starting her own business. She began with a solid business plan. "In this economy, you can't afford to wing it," says McDonough. "You need a plan of what you are doing, why you are doing it, who it will help and how you will bring it to the market. You must put it

on paper. Then you must live it, be the customer, be the client; even a dog knows when you are faking it! Finally re-look at what you have created every six months and do it better!"

"Corporate America taught me to never stop learning and absorbing all of the information that people are willing to teach you." Colleen stated confidently.

Feeling that there was a lack of professionalism in the dog walking/sitting world, Colleen set lofty goals for her business from the start. In addition to obtaining the proper bonding, insurance and certificates, she wanted to set the standard for excellence and raise the professional level of the industry. And after only a year, Barks and Blooms was the first pet sitting business in the country to win the PSI (Pet Sitters International PAW Award) for outstanding professionalism. Pet Sitters International is a worldwide organization made up of 8,000 members. Barks and Blooms also finished as a Top 5 finalist for Pet Sitter of the year at the New Orleans International Convention.



pictures (l-r) Maggie Rankin & Sofia, Jessica Wood & Dorothy, Mary Frances Dael & Cody, Kelli Archibald & Papa, Sandy Kempton with Maggie Mae & Barney, Colleen McDonough & Chrostopher, Dawn Goode & Jazzy, and Koda the German Shephard

Over the past three years, Colleen has not only strived to raise the level of professionalism and to be one of the most successful businesses in the country, she has also strived to be one of the most successful fundraising businesses.

"I want to give back what this industry has given to me," she stated.

Being top of her game in sales for the various companies she worked for prior to starting her own, Colleen learned another key to success is relationship-building. Shortly after her company was created, Colleen reached out to the Humane Society of Harford County to see how she and her business could make a difference with them.

"Partner with your community and your community will partner with you," said Colleen.

Through the close bond established between the two organizations, Barks and Blooms is now one of the top fundraisers for the Humane Society's Bowl-a-rama. Barks and Blooms has also teamed up with the Baltimore County Humane Society, several shelter organizations and other nonprofits in the area.

Another key to the success of Colleen's business has been her reliable, trustworthy staff who love animals the way she does. She was amazed that it wasn't too difficult to find her team members; many have sought her out.

To become a part of the team of "fantastically fabulous dog walkers" as Colleen calls them, one must endure three rounds of interviews and thorough background and reference checks. Once hired, the dog walkers work in small teams and follow a training manual with a strict set of rules and are observed for a period of time before they are on their own in the field. Colleen has set up managers in each of the territories who help to coordinate the various dog walkers on a daily basis. She also hired two managers to oversee social media, community relations and charities.

Barks and Blooms services include: in-home play sessions, walks, overnight stays, personal training and exercise regime and much more! In addition to pet walking, services such as watering plants, picking vegetables, getting mail, checking pipes and rotating lights are offered.

Staff are rewarded daily when greeted by clients' pets whom they have come to love and adore.

"It's about us becoming a part of someone else's families. And it's about the dogs and how they trust us and love us back," Colleen stated with tears in her eyes. "And of course it is about earning complete trust from the owners, many of whose pets are the center of their universe!"



Even though they find daily rewards from those they serve, Colleen feels strongly about continually patting her staff on the back for the great work they do. "This business would not be what it is without my wonderful and dedicated staff," she said. "I've worked hard to empower them to feel good about what they do. They are the face of Barks and Blooms and I would not be here without them."

Always setting her sights higher, Colleen has grand plans to take the company to the next level in the near future. One of the plans is to franchise. She calls 2011 "the year of the big rehearsal." She hopes to expand in different areas throughout Maryland before moving into other states.

Not only did Colleen pursue her career dreams in her 40's, but she also found the man of her dreams, Paul Thompson, and started singing in a band! When she isn't on the telephone with clients or staff or pounding the pavement with a dog or two in toe or spending time with her husband in their lovely home in Baldwin, she is belting out on stage singing for a classic rock band called, "Declassified." You can catch them at many local establishments around the area.

On a recent Saturday afternoon, Colleen was outside planting in her garden. She stopped for a minute and glanced around at her beautiful home, her cat running loose in the yard, and her kennel that she and her husband designed next to her house. She thought of her life as it is - finding the love of her life.... singing in a band....running her own successful business.... cherishing time with animals she adores....giving back to her community.

"My dreams have come true," she said to herself. With a big, bold smile, she repeated it again in our interview.