

Yard scooper in dogged pursuit



Video: [Keeping Yards Clean](#)

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Monday, October 08, 2007

BOCA RATON — Scott Chapman is a No. 2 lover. Yep. He loves poop. And he is happy to tell you that and more. After all, the pooper-scooper frees 150 yards a week of dog feces.

A native of Fort Lauderdale now living in Boca Raton, Chapman, 45, likes to use a typical joke among poop-scoopers to explain how he went from being a chef in local country clubs to creating [Scoop da Poo LLC](#).

"I just stepped into it," he says. If pressed to talk seriously, he'll tell you another joke anyway: "I just got burned out in the kitchen."

Accustomed to being on his feet for long hours in the heat of a kitchen, the poop-scooping concept sounded good to Chapman when his wife came across it in a dog magazine.

Founded in 2003, his may be the first poop-scooping business to serve Broward and Palm Beach counties, from Pompano Beach to Boynton Beach. Chapman could not have anticipated the demand he would find.

"It's like lawn service, you know," Chapman says. "Thirty years ago, nobody thought they would pay to have their grass cut."

Pet ownership is at its highest level, with 71.1 million households in the nation owning at least one pet, according to a survey by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association.

The survey also reports:

- There are 74.8 million dogs and 88.3 million cats in the United States.
- Of dog owners, 6 percent say they have bought pooper-scoopers during the past 12 months.
- In large cities around the world, dog owners are paying much more in fines- up to \$635 in Paris and \$2,000 in London. Just last month New York City proposed to increase its pooper-scooper fine from \$100 to \$200.
- Boca Raton has fines ranging from \$25 to \$50.

Under Palm Beach County animal waste law, which the animal care and control division enforces, the owner of every dog and cat is responsible for the removal of any feces deposited by his animal on public property, public walks, public beaches, recreation areas and private property of others. A person can face fines from \$50 to \$250.

For a regular-sized yard with one dog, Chapman charges \$12 for a weekly visit and \$3 for every additional dog. His prices may vary in some special circumstances.

"It also depends on what the dog eats, believe it or not," he says. "If they are in a high-fiber diet ..." he pauses to spare most of the details on size, smell and texture.

It's the microscopic details that have everyone looking at pet waste as a serious issue.

A single gram of dog waste can contain 23 million fecal coliform bacteria - the same germs that shut down West Palm Beach's water system - which are known to cause cramps, diarrhea, intestinal illness and kidney disorders in humans.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that two or three days' worth of droppings from 100 dogs would generate enough bacteria to temporarily close a bay if it washed into the water.

Chapman drives extra miles to take the dog waste to the county landfill. He will work in the rain, "unless there's lightning." Sunday is his only day off.

He often advises his customers if he sees something wrong with their pet's habits even though, technically, he's not a veterinarian. The sight of 300 pounds of excrement a week somehow makes him confident enough to point out any abnormalities.

Chapman's business has grown to 100 customers, prompting him to look for a part-time assistant, which hasn't been easy.

"It definitely takes a particular kind of person," he says. "I've talked to so many people. Most of them say, 'Forget it! No way!'"

Saving marriages, bad backs

Liz Sterling says Scoop da Poo saved her marriage about three years ago.

"The second I saw Scott's ad, I just knew that would save a huge amount of frustration I was experiencing in my relationship," said Sterling, of Boca Raton.

What to do with the waste left by three cats and two dogs was causing many fights between her and her husband, a situation best described in her own words:

"I was in deep doo-doo in my marriage."

June Backer couldn't have found him at a better time.

She had a herniated disk and couldn't clean after her dogs. Chapman was supposed to do the job until she was well. That was two years ago.

"Once you get someone like Chapman, you don't want to go back," Backer said.

It seems like there's plenty of Chapmans for everyone.

Everybody wants to get into the act

The Professional Pooper-Scooper, a guide Chapman said helped him start his business, mentions that fewer than 40 dog-waste removal services existed in the United States in 1997. Two years later, that number had nearly tripled, to 119.

The oldest business of this nature in the country appears to be Colorado-based Poop VanScoop, which has been operating since the late 1970s.

A pooper-scooper himself, Matthew Osborn, the book's author, founded his business in Columbus, Ohio, in 1988. Over the next 10 years, he writes, the business grew to serve more than 650 customers every week, with revenue of more than \$20,000 a month, seven employees including a full-time manager, and six trucks.

It could happen to Chapman, even though he already can smell the competition. Another company, Scoop De Doo, emerged around the same time as Chapman's and serves the Jupiter area. Both companies are registered with the Association of Professional Animal Waste Specialists.

Technology also has brought along Poop-Freeze Spray and improved plastic bags that make it easier for any pet owner to clean up. Chapman says he is not worried. The factors that allow a business like his to exist - physical limitations, lack of time and repugnance - are not likely to go away.

He expects the same devoted owners who name their pets as primary beneficiaries, talk to them in the phone, leave them messages on answering machines, sign the pet's name on a holiday card and spend \$41 billion a year on them to continue needing him to collect poop.

"Unless they come out with something, like in movies, that just makes it disappear," he says. "If someone came out with that, then I'd be worried."