

8-koi plans to purchase own facility, create pet-friendly workplace, add pet-insurance benefit; Inga Young's Artie is top Coton de Tulear in U.S.

By Ken Datzman

MERRITT ISLAND (June 10, 2021) — Businesswoman Inga Young, president and CEO of 8-koi, has been shopping the market to invest in a commercial facility for her growing firm, which specializes in providing a range of services to government agencies nationwide.

Her company just announced it was one of six competitively selected Woman-Owned Small Businesses to win the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' "Horizontal Construction, Renovation, Repair, and Incidental Design Indefinite-Delivery Indefinite Quality" contract for a three-year period of performance with work taking place in Alabama, Florida, Mississippi and Georgia.

The general construction contract requires 8-koi to provide supervisory, technical and administrative staff to include field superintendents, quality control managers, architects, engineers, interior designers, clerks and project managers, among others. 8-koi maintains a general contractor's license in Florida and has provided design-build services to government clients since 2016.

Task orders for engineering design and construction projects may include new construction or rehabilitation of facilities and structures such as project management offices or shop buildings, storage facilities, picnic shelters, courtesy docks, and boat storage, to include power, paving, and roofing in the Corps of Engineers' Mobile District.

"This is our first contract with the Corps of Engineers and our team is looking forward to supporting this agency with improvements to public-use areas in the Southeast region," said Young.

8-koi Construction Division Vice President Otto Herrea added, "It's always exciting to start work with a new customer to learn their preferences, adopt their standards, and develop the relationship over time to meet their needs."

Currently, the company she founded in 2008 has offices in Melbourne and at the Financial Center at Merritt Island. With a corporate-owned office building in mind, one of her goals is to create a pet-friendly workplace with a dedicated on-site area for employee pets.

"One of the buildings we are looking at has a sizable office that goes out to a courtyard with pavers and a grassy area. That would be very attractive because it would be the perfect place where employees could bring their pets," said Young.

"I am a pet lover. With our own building, employees will be able to bring their pets to work on different days. We will have a schedule so that the pets can get acclimated to the environment, and not have all the employees bring their pets at the same time," she added.

A pet-friendly workplace is defined as one that allows pets in the workplace regularly or occasionally, or offers a pet-friendly employee benefit, such as pet insurance.

A recent study conducted by Nationwide Insurance, in partnership with the Human Animal Bond Research Institute, reveals that 90 percent of employees in pet-friendly workplaces feel "highly connected" to their company's mission; fully engaged with their work; and willing to recommend their employer to others. In contrast, less than 65 percent of employees in non-pet friendly workplaces made the same claim.

Additionally, more than three times as many employees at pet-friendly workplaces report a "positive" working relationship with their boss and co-workers, significantly more than those in non-pet friendly environments.



BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

Businessowner Inga Young of 8-koi, a firm which specializes in providing services to government agencies nationwide, is looking to purchase a building for her team. Young's plan includes creating a pet-friendly workplace for 8-koi employees. She has been bringing her dogs to work since they were puppies. From left, the dogs are: Elton, Sally, and Astro. They are Coton de Tulears, the 'Royal Dog of Madagascar.' Artie, who took the day off, was preparing for the 145th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show June 11-13 in Tarrytown, N.Y. He is the top Coton in America. Young is at the firm's Merritt Island office.

In that same study, 72 percent of employees who work for a pet-friendly company would decline a job offer with another company at similar pay versus 44 percent who work in non-pet friendly workplaces.

And 91 percent of employees who work for a pet-friendly business feel the company "supports their mental well-being" versus 53 percent who work in a non-pet friendly environment.

Expect workplaces to become more pet-friendly after the pandemic. Employers plan to enact more pet-friendly office policies. Currently, about 7 percent of employers allow pets at work, according to a survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management.

New surveys show that more and more Americans believe pets should be allowed in the workplace.

Seventy-five million Americans believe having pets in the workplace makes people happier, and 70 million people believe having pets at work reduces stress, says a survey by the American Pet Products Association.

Young said 8-koi will also be adding pet insurance as a company benefit.

"It will be part of our employee compensation plan. Every year we survey our employees to get feedback about benefits, and pet insurance ranks high. So we will be adding pet insurance to our benefits package. It's one of the things our benefits broker offered us and I think it's a great idea. But we wanted to make sure that it was a benefit that the employees wanted."

Voluntary pet-insurance plans are one of the fastest-growing employee benefits, according to the Society for Human Resource Management. In fact, it's ranked third in a new survey by SHRM listing the popularity of employee benefits.

The U.S. pet-insurance market is supported by various growth drivers, such as an increasing love for dogs and cats, and growing interest of millennials for pets.

Please see 8-koi, page 19

8-koi

Continued from page 12

Fifteen years ago, only 3 percent of U.S. pet owners had insurance for their animals.

Pet-insurance plans are currently offered by 47 percent of employers. Sixty-nine percent will offer voluntary pet-insurance plans by 2022 or beyond, the Society for Human Resource Management survey projects.

Young, a University of Florida accounting graduate, says pet insurance is about \$30 per month per dog for a basic plan if purchased individually, but could be as high as \$50 per month.

"Under a corporate plan it's much cheaper. So that's a good benefit for our employees."

As veterinary medicine becomes more technologically advanced, the cost of care increases. That's because of higher costs associated with the equipment, facilities, and training required to provide higher-quality services.

Pet insurance can help by offsetting some or most of the costs of diagnosing, treating and managing your pet's illness or injury.

Young says she brings her pets to work every day. They are not ordinary pets. She has five Coton de Tulears (KO-Tone Dih TOO-Lay-ARE), small, immensely charming dogs. They are considered a rare breed. The breed is hypoallergenic and does not shed.

"They have been coming to the office since they were puppies. They are well-trained," she said.

Young said the Coton de Tulear is the "Royal Dog of Madagascar," adding, "They are revered in Madagascar. Tulear is a port in Madagascar." Their lifespan is 15 to 19 years, according to the American Kennel Club. "They are known for being great therapy dogs," said Young.

The Coton is a bright, happy-go-lucky companion dog whose favorite activities include "clowning, cavorting, and

following their special human around the house."

Amusing traits of these dogs include "unique vocalizations and a knack for walking on their hind legs. They are naturally clownish and lighthearted."

The names of Young's Cotons include Astro, named after the canine character in the cartoon *The Jetsons*; Sally, named after the late astronaut Sally Ride; and Sir Elton, named after "Rocket Man" Elton John, the British singer. "My Cotons were born during the SpaceX Dragon launch window, so that is why we went with space-related names," said Young.

"They were born from my female dog Trixie and my male dog Artie, who will be competing at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show. Artie is the No. 1 Coton in the United States right now. We're proud of that."

Trixie has been in the limelight, too. In May 2019, Young journeyed to China when she took Trixie to Shanghai for the World Dog Show competition. Trixie won the title World Champion.

"Trixie flew all the way to Shanghai — a 20-hour flight. It was a long flight, to and from, but Trixie took it all in stride. No problem."

Young said she also started competing Sally. "She is currently No. 2 in the ranking. Both of them — Artie and Sally — have won the American Kennel Club Puppy of the Year on different years. So Sally is definitely following in her daddy's footsteps."

The 145th annual Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, presented by Purina, was held June 11-13 (The deadline for this story was June 10). The location for this year's show was moved because of the pandemic.

It shifted from Madison Square Garden in New York City to the Lyndhurst Estate, a property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, in Tarrytown, N.Y.

"This year's Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show is outside but spectators will not be allowed because of the pandemic," said Young. The show was televised on Fox Sports.

The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, first held in 1877, is America's second-longest continuously held sporting event, behind only the Kentucky Derby. It has survived power outages, snowstorms, a national depression, two World Wars, and a tugboat strike that threatened to shut down New York City, according to its "Facts and Figures" history.

Artie has a professional handler, Laura King, who is based in Milan, Ill. King herself has the No. 1 "All-Breed" dog in America, Striker, a Samoyed. The Samoyed is a "powerful, tireless dog with a thick all-white coat impervious to cold," according to the American Kennel Club description. Samoyeds, the "smiling sledge dogs," were bred for hard work in the world's coldest locales. In the Siberian town of Oymyakon, for instance, temperatures of minus-60 degrees are common.

"Laura's team is called Daybreak. She travels in a commercial truck that has been customized for her dogs. She is on the road a good part of the year," said Young. "The Top Dog schedule is grueling. Striker is her special dog. A lot of times Artie goes wherever Striker goes on the circuit. Laura has a large team of handlers and groomers that travel with her."

Young said she is excited to be competing at the 145th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

"We will be up against some good competition. They are all great show dogs. I know most of the owners personally. I will be happy for any one of them to win but, of course, we want Artie, our dog to win. It's going to be interesting. This is the big event. We're ready."



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