

Relationship figures big in six-year journey to start pet-care business

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By the time they had adopted seven dogs from friends and neighbors, David and Juliana Garcia concluded that Las Cruces sorely needed a business that served animals and the people who love them.

The couple bought a van with their savings to start a mobile grooming business for large pets. By the time they were ready to buy a second van to accommodate their growing client base, the Garcias were thinking about opening a hotel and day camp, with spa services on the side, for dogs and cats.

In the challenging years between conception and creation of Pet Planet (petplanetcomplex.com) in 2014 — years that coincided with the deepest recession in nearly a century — the young entrepreneurs drew on their passion for animals and their financial partnership with The Loan Fund to sustain them.

Timing is everything

In 2008, the Garcias purchased the land on which they planned to build Pet Planet and lined up a construction loan through a traditional lender. Then the real-estate market crashed, and the bank withdrew its loan offer.

The couple approached The Loan Fund in 2010 for money to buy the second van.

“We made this choice with two things in mind: one, not financing the entire project on our own, and two, establishing a relationship with a lending company (that) could see we were serious

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and responsible business owners,” Juliana Garcia said.

Two years later, they returned to The Loan Fund seeking a construction loan to build Pet Planet.

“The Loan Fund took the time to understand our personal situation and needs,” Garcia said. “The service was so personalized that it was a no brainer to get our second loan with them. The trust they have had in us is something for which we will always be grateful.”

Norma Valdez, director of lending at The Loan Fund, was impressed by the couple’s well-written plan to start a business that catered to clients who expect high-quality care for their pets — and their tenacity and perseverance during a series of construction-related setbacks.

“We financed construction of the building,” Valdez said, “and provided guidance and payment flexibility,” during challenges that included an unlicensed contractor who failed to obtain permits and left the Garcias responsible for \$32,000 in unpaid bills from subcontractors.

“There was no way to get our money back,” Garcia said. “The Loan Fund extended our interest-only portion of the loan until we could figure out what we were going to do — and then again when our second contractor took longer than expected (to finish the project). It took a lot of extra money, a lot of lost sleep, countless tears and a lot of determination. And it was all worth it.”

Two years after it opened, the mobile grooming business and Pet Planet are growing so well that the Garcias are thinking about expanding their pet-care universe.

More than money

The support they received from The Loan Fund wasn’t just financial, Garcia said. The Loan Fund’s expertise and moral support were just as important.

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“When you go through something like this, having people emotionally understand your struggles is huge,” she said.

Supporting businesses like Pet Planet is a core mission of the nonprofit, community development lender, which specializes in lending to small businesses and startups that lack the track record to qualify for a more traditional loan. The Loan Fund can be reached toll free at (866) 873-6746 or online at loanfund.org.

Finance New Mexico assists individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to FinanceNewMexico.org.

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