

# From dogs to dollars:

## Young entrepreneur’s love of canines inspires small business

By **MARY KOPPES**  
*Pilot writer*

Twelve-year-old Luc Diaz didn’t waste any time getting his Alaska Mountain Mutts dog treat business up and running after moving to Petersburg from Girdwood, Alaska in April. Many around town already associate the industrious youngster with the homemade treats from events like Mayfest, The Market and Oktoberfest Art Share where he’s become a staple vendor.

The quick start to the Petersburg chapter of his business was made possible by his prior years of experience. The 7th grade homeschooler began making and selling the “positively delicious and nutritious” treats when he was just seven years old.

“It started actually when I was living in Maui, and I wanted to make some spending money so I thought up this,” Diaz said. At the time he was a competitive gymnast and wanted to earn money to purchase a trampoline.

Starting from his love of man’s best friend, Diaz began brainstorming business ideas. A chance encounter with a book about homemade dog goods set him on the path to Alaska

Mountain Mutts.

“We happened upon a book to make homemade dog stuff, and it sparked the idea. He was kind of talking out ideas and thinking of it and what he could do—doggy clothes, doggy this, doggy that,” said Diaz’s mother and marketing manager, Maria Diaz.

In the beginning Luc Diaz experimented with different shapes, sizes and packing for treats until he honed in on which are most popular and effective to make with his recipes.

“I did a paw print (shaped treat), but the bones are by far the best...People like the bones,” he noted.

His business, which began as Maui Mutts in Hawaii, really took off through selling at festivals and in a tourist shop in Girdwood.

“He started selling in a tourist shop up north too and everybody would want a package of dog treats to take back. Ya know, Alaska Mountain Mutts. He sold the big ones that he called ‘Alaska size,’” Maria Diaz recounted.

The ‘Alaska size’ treats are a jumbo-sized version of his popular milk-bone sized treats, which will be a special offering at the



Submitted Photo

Twelve-year-old owner of Alaska Mountain Mutts dog-treat business, Luc Diaz, proudly displays his most recent batch of dog treats, including his latest creation: training treats. Diaz has been making and selling the treats since he was seven years old.

annual Christmas Bazaar at the PFI cookhouse on Dec. 6. The tasty giants make a great gift for canine family members the Diaz’s said.

Diaz is also working on smaller training-sized treats to offer along with a seasonal cinnamon-flavored treat at the bazaar. He offered a seasonal pumpkin-flavored treat at Oktoberfest.

Though he receives some help from his mother, Luc Diaz does the majority of the work for the business on his own, which includes preparing the dough, baking and packaging the treats and doing the sales work. On production days he does hours of work in the kitchen.

“To make a batch it’s a couple of hours, ‘cause you have to roll it, cut it and bake it. The baking takes the longest, between 30-40 minutes,” he said.

Maria Diaz compared the process to making sugar cookies, a process familiar to many preparing for Julebukking and other holiday parties in December.

“It’s pretty time intensive,” she said. “But that’s part of it, is that it is a handmade, individually made product.”

In the dog-treat business, Luc Diaz interacts more with humans than their four-legged friends, but he also takes on dog-walking and -sitting jobs and has even done some training with shy pups and search-and-rescue dogs.

He has also worked with dogs and mushers in Alaska’s sled dog races.

“I’ve been a dog handler for

the past two Iditarods. And the last Knik 200,” he said. His work with the sled dogs included feeding, checking for foot injuries, harnessing the dogs and scooping poop. He also worked pre-race to calm down the eager canines.

“You have to hold them back

as they go up to the start line, otherwise they’ll just bolt,” he said.

He’s hoping to continue that work at the 2015 Iditarod in March, and eventually to run the long-distance race with his own team of dogs one day.

To that end, Luc Diaz is hoping to get a dog of his own soon. He’d like a puppy that he can train for hunting or mushing.

“Part of the reason I want a puppy is that the work that I want it to do would be a lot easier to train it for as a puppy,” he said, adding that the characteristics of a good racing dog are, “speed, intelligence and the want to pull and ability to handle the cold.”

In addition to working, he enjoys the companionship of canines. They can be “a friend that won’t argue with you on what to do,” he said, laughing.

The Diaz’s can be reached for inquiries about Alaska Mountain Mutts dog treats or services at [akmountainmutts@yahoo.com](mailto:akmountainmutts@yahoo.com). Diaz’s treats can also now be found at Waterways Veterinary Clinic in town.



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Luc Diaz practices his mushing skills with a friend’s dog in Girdwood, Alaska. Diaz relocated to Petersburg this spring and brought his love of canines and dog-treat business, Alaska Mountain Mutts, with him.

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