

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE: BOW-WOW BONES SEEKS MORE STORES TO SELL ITS DOG TREATS

By Jeffrey Symes
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Their ribboned packages are becoming more and more recognizable in the Seacoast. From Barker's Farm in Stratham to the Nubble Lighthouse Gift Shop in York, Bow-Wow Bones dog treats is gaining a strong and loyal fanbase among the pet set. But behind the scenes, the makers of Bow-Wow Bones have their own strong commitment to the work. Overcoming a common stigma in a world that sees their disabilities first, they have a shared belief in their ability to deliver a quality product.

It's been seven years since two Portsmouth High School teachers tinkered with recipes and started baking dog treats in the school kitchen with a small class of students in the school's Transition Program. Now formally and legally known as Bow Wow Bones, Inc., the operation is still going strong today. And though the bakers and baggers, and even the kitchen locations, have changed over the years, the core group that came together at the start remains at the core of the effort today to enable Seacoast adults with disabilities to contribute to the



AMANDA,STEPHEN, AND SUPPORT STAFF MARIAH MAKE DOG TREATS AT BOW-WOW BONES, WHICH HAS CREATED JOBS FOR THOSE WITH DISABILITIES FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS.



STEPHEN AND MICHAEL ARE LIFELONG FRIENDS AND CO-WORKERS AT BOW-WOW BONES, WHICH USES THE COMMERCIAL KITCHEN AT BETHANY CHURCH IN GREENLAND. THE USE OF THE KITCHEN IS DONATED BY THE CHURCH'S CONGREGATION.

community and take part in a business of their own.

The work opportunities, even in a good economy with low unemployment, are still rare for people with disabilities. Of the nearly 84,000 people with disabilities in NH between the ages of 18 and 64, only 42-percent were employed by 2017. That's compared to the more than 82-percent of the same age group without disabilities in the state.

It's a statement from a close-knit community, then, when, every Thursday, cars and vans arrive one by one in the mostly deserted parking lot of Bethany Church in Greenland. In pairs and small groups, passengers and drivers alike make their way inside, setting straight to their work in the kitchen and an adjacent space where a long work table is overflowing with plastic bags and labels. Use of the commercial kitchen and the space is donated by the Bethany Church congregation.

Though no one is assigned particular tasks, they usually go for the task they've become familiar with until the task has become their own. So Lewis wheels over to the table to begin bagging and Amanda heads into the kitchen to prep dough for cutting and baking. Everyone is engaged and focused on the work-at-hand, including support staff and parents who accompany the workers.

Among the parents are Gail Brown and Nancy Clayburgh who have kept this operation going when it ended at the high school when everyone in the program turned 21 years of age. Over the years, they estimate about 50 people have come through the kitchen doors



CHELSEA OFFERS A SMILE WHILE SHE WORKS AT BOW-WOW BONES.

to work. Clayburgh calls the business "a labor of love." It could also be called a family affair. Brown's daughter, Chelsea, and Clayburgh's son, Michael, have both been with Bow-Wow Bones since it started.

"Everyone seems to enjoy it so much," says Clayburgh. "It's become a social experience, but they're doing something productive. It's a business."

Indeed, it's a business that Clayburgh and Brown would like to see expand in order to give others with disabilities the opportunity to participate in a unique enterprise. But as a small business built and sustained largely on heartfelt commitment, there is not much in an operating budget for marketing. Right now, Bow-Wow Bones are offered in about a dozen Seacoast-area businesses and organizations, and their booth is a popular one at the



CORA TAKES A BREAK FROM PACKAGING BOW-WOW BONES PEANUT BUTTER DOG TREATS.



LEWIS IS FOCUSED ON HIS WORK AT BOW-WOW BONES.

Portsmouth Farmers' Market, but the goal is to find more retail outlets.

On the production end, Bow-Wow Bones has become a fine-tuned machine, with a process from dough prep to cutting to baking to packaging and clean-up down to a science. The peanut butter treats are cut in a variety of shapes, from bones and hearts to a customized lighthouse for the Nubble Lighthouse Gift Shop. The goal each week is to have 100 bags of the treats ready for delivery, with the previous week's baked batch getting weighed and packaged in the distinctive Bow-Wow Bones bags.

Now it's just a matter of finding more shelves for those bags in the community. For more information, visit Bow-Wow Bones at <https://www.bow-wowbones.com/>



This article is provided by Incorporated in 1983, One Sky Community Services has been dedicated to providing a comprehensive array of services, supports and programs to individuals and families with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as acquired brain disorders. A private 5013C nonprofit organization, it is the designated area agency serving the following communities: Brentwood, Deerfield, East Kingston, Epping, Exeter, Fremont, Greenland, Hampton, Hampton, Falls, Kensington, Kingston, New Castle, Newfields, Newington, Newmarket, North Hampton, Northwood, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Raymond, Rye, Seabrook, South Hampton and Stratham. One Sky works with nearly 1,200 individuals and families on a yearly basis.