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Pet project turns into runaway hit

A PET project that started seven years ago has become a runaway success story for a South Lakeland business-woman.

Barking Mad, a home-from-home pet care service for dogs, was launched by Lee Southern after she got the idea while searching for someone to look after her Dalmatian puppy, Bronte, while she went away on holiday.

She was working as a sales and marketing consultant in the hospitality industry at the time, but said she immediately spotted a gap in the market and decided to take the plunge by going it alone.

Since then, the business has boomed and today **Barking Mad** has 45 franchises all over the country, with more than 4,000 customers and an annual

turnover in excess of £1 million.

Now the business, which is based at Barbon, near Kirkby Lonsdale, and employs five staff, has sealed its first venture overseas with the launch of a franchise in Cyprus, and it is looking to widen its horizons still further.

"The company is now actively recruiting franchisees across Europe to join this successful and fast-moving business, and with the added appeal of working with animals while being able to enjoy the sunshine, we are hoping this will prove to be rather tempting for dog lovers everywhere," said managing director Lee.

Business growth has been largely through word of mouth, and Lee believes there is plenty more room for expansion: "I originally thought we would end up having 100 franchises, but now I think it will be about 150."

Barking Mad offers peace of mind to dog owners by allowing them to leave their pets in safe hands while they

are away. It has proved especially popular with clients who don't want to leave their pets in kennels while they are away. The aim is to ensure the minimum distress and disruption to the dog by ensuring that its daily routine is mirrored with a host family chosen to care for it, including its food, exercise routines and even sleeping arrangements.

Each **Barking Mad** franchise has a network of host families, and matches each dog to the right person, based on lifestyle and environment.

Lee started the business in 2000, and soon realised there was a much wider demand for the service, based on frequent requests from visitors to the **Barking Mad** website.

Since then, she has branched out by launching a range of **Barking Mad** merchandise as well as a dog deli, selling treats for pampered pooches.

"Setting up **Barking Mad** was the best decision I ever made. I am delighted to be running a business which

provides such a necessary service for dog owners. Since I started the company, I've never looked back," she said.

LEFT: Lee Southern, left with some of her franchisees.



