

The entrepreneur behind a thriving NYC dog cafe

Transcript

By Juliana Taomin Giacone

Narration:

Coppy Holzman and his daughter Logan Mikhly are like any NYC dog owner in some ways – if they could let their dogs tag along with them anywhere in the city, they would. But that's not always possible.

AMBI: the street outside the cafe in Alphabet City

Coppy Holzman:

My dog is Boris, her dog is Horton – and we would find that one of us would have to go inside to get the menu and order for the other person, cuz at that time the health department did not allow dogs in any cafes.

Narration:

So the pair has an idea – that would take their love for their companions, to another level.

What if he and his daughter, could go to a cafe with their dogs together – and actually stay inside?

CH:

So Logan my daughter and partner came up with the idea, let's work with the Health Department and figure out how we can accommodate people who wanna have dinner, on a dime, wanna have coffee, (SOUND: dogs barking) wanna drink beer, wanna have good food with their dogs.

That idea became a reality in 2018.

CLIP: YouTube mix –

FEMALE ANNOUNCER:

The dogs days of summer are taking on a whole new meaning, quite literally, as some hot spots around town are catering–

(link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q-DntD01mQ>)

ANOTHER FEMALE ANNOUNCER:

–it’s New York City’s first dog-friendly cafe and community space that offers coffee, beer, wine, and snacks.

(link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wL5CKzRzwo4>)

Narration:

Coppy and Logan opened their first dog cafe, Boris and Horton in Alphabet City.

AMBI: inside the cafe in Alphabet City – customers talking, instrumental music plays from the speakers

Among the corners filled with, dive bars, thrift stores, and hidden community gardens – Boris and Horton was born.

(SOUND: dogs barking)

The unique structure of the cafe makes it clean and functional for all the customers – dogs and their humans.

CH:

So we came up with this design, it’s a vestibule – there’s an entrance on the cafe side ... there’s an entrance on the dog side, and we worked with them, patented it, and came up with this design.

In addition, only one door to each side of the cafe opens at once.

Narration:

This keeps the dogs from roaming into the cafe counter area – where the food and drinks are prepared.

Customers can pick up their menu items, and bring them to the side where the dogs walk around freely.

(SOUND: dogs barking)

At the front of the cafe, there's a painting of the two dogs that inspired it all. Boris is a shaggy-haired pit bull terrier mix, with white and brown patches – and Horton – is a small grey and white mystery breed dog, with a distinguishable snaggle tooth.

They're both rescue dogs.

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Not many people can turn a great idea into a thriving business.

Coppy's background is in business entrepreneurship and Logan's background is in dog rescue operations.

The combination of their expertise explains how the two created a recipe for success.

CH:

I originally grew up in Western Pennsylvania, I went to college in Philly–

Narration:

–where he majored in economics at the University of Pennsylvania. He then started his career at Macy's. In 1980, he became Senior Vice President of the company – at just 25. Later he went on to co-found WebVan, an online grocery delivery company worth 9 billion dollars.

In 2005 he founded another business, called Charity Buzz.

CH

–which was celebrity experiences you auction off for charity. So, during the decade or so that I did Charitybuzz, we gave away about half a billion dollars to charity ... so as an example, have lunch with Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, have Taylor Swift give you a singing lesson, you know, the money would go to her charity of choice.

And all that was a focus on customer service ... so that's a consistent thread throughout my career.

Narration

In 2018, Coppy sold Charity Buzz.

Now, at 68, his focus is on Boris and Horton.

CH:

We have many, many strategic partnerships–

(SOUND: cell phone ringing)

–but, well, excuse me a second I'm gonna answer this call ...

(SOUND: a woman laughing)

She's my number one strategic partner.

Kelly Crook:

So hi, my name is Kelly Crook, I founded Pupper Cup. We make dairy-free ice cream for dogs. And I pop up here at Boris and Horton every Sunday, and we scoop ice cream to order for the dogs.

Narration

In spring 2020 – Kelly started popping up outside of Boris and Horton – at a time when they were only doing window service.

KC

You know a lot of people said during the pandemic, that it was like the one thing they're doing that day, they're going to come to Boris and Horton get a coffee and get an ice cream for their dog.

CH

I'm gonna brag about you ...she started out of her house–

KC

–he's my biggest cheerleader!

CH

The dogs love it. So we like to align ourselves (**SOUND: dogs barking**) with small folks, that um do well and they grow, we grow–

KC

–yeah Sunday's my favorite day of the week because I'm here!

CH

And it's my favorite day also.

(SOUND: multiple people laughing)

AMBI: inside the cafe in Williamsburg, a Taylor Swift song plays from the speakers. Copsy talks to customers.

Narration:

This summer, Copsy and Logan opened a second location in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. I went there on a Sunday morning to see him in action – taking customers' orders and running the cafe gift shop.

He says interacting with the customers and the dogs is the best part of his job. But it's not without its challenges.

CH:

So one day I had a lady whose dog had an accident, it happens I cleaned up the accident.

Narration:

But then saw the dog had to go again... He walked up to the lady and said–

CH:

–“I already cleaned it up once, can you take the dog outside?” And the lady said, “No, I'd prefer if my dog goes inside”.

And she wrote us a bad Yelp review. Saying that the restaurant doesn't encourage dogs to go inside. They make you go outside. Like, of course, we don't encourage it. And why would we?

Narration:

Coppy has dreams of expanding the business into a national brand. Maybe even a global brand, one day.

But for now, Coppy's scoping out another location to open up closer to home – within the next year – perhaps somewhere on the Upper West Side.

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MUSIC: “Soothe” Jazz Lines – Blue Dot Sessions

Onomatopoeia - Sounds like New York - is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This episode was written and produced by me, Juliana Taomin Giacone. Joanne Faryon is our professor and executive producer. Music by Blue Dot Sessions. Special thanks to Peter Leonard.