

## Roxy By The Water: Amanda Wilbourne & Nautical Dog

“I was twenty years old and had no clue what I was doing,” says Amanda Wilbourne. She did, however, have a corgi named Roxy. She was Amanda Wilbourne’s first dog as an adult, and Amanda loved her. “I would always try to find my cute little pet stores and stuff for her,” says Amanda, “to buy stuff because I was so obsessed with her.” Until, one day, with retail experience and a supportive boyfriend (now husband) at her disposal, Amanda created her own.

Nautical Dog, Amanda’s pet supply store, originally opened in 2006 on the outskirts of Mattaponi, where Amanda’s parents lived at the time. Though Nautical Dog retains its origins in its name, it’s been a New Town business for over eleven years. “We just loved the area,” says Amanda, who grew up near Richmond. The store, which carries dog and cat products, specializes in pet nutrition at competitive prices. “I can sell anything and everything,” says Amanda, “but...if I wouldn’t give it to my own personal pets, it’s not sold in the store.” Customers get advice from Amanda and her staff tailored to their pets’ needs, at prices that are the same or lower than their corporate competitors. Ninety percent of their foods are sold at Minimum Advertised Price (MAP), the lowest amount it can be sold for anywhere. Nautical Dog also has a loyalty program for their food products (buy twelve and the thirteenth is free), and a rewards program for the whole store (one dollar spent = one point gained, with different 250-point and 500-point items available every month). Combined with their personalized customer service and their investment in the community—Nautical Dog can be relied upon whenever someone is in need of a raffle basket—Amanda’s business is undeniably unique.

Currently, Amanda and her five-woman team are taking orders by phone and delivering them curbside, right across Main Street from Barnes & Noble. “It’s been stressful,” says Amanda, who has two small children, multiple pets, and a half-built house in addition to the stresses incurred by the pandemic. “It’s hard. We’re adapting every day.” Nautical Dog and other pet stores are essential businesses, and not required to take the safety measures they’ve adopted, but Amanda stands by the choice to go curbside only. “We don’t want people to feel like they need to go online to purchase their stuff now—we’re still here, we’re still open, we’re still here to help.” Some new customers have come to Nautical Dog because they can’t find their brand, a brand that Amanda might not carry, but she’s willing to order it for them to keep everyone’s pets fed. In addition to meeting that basic need, the staff has been using what little downtime they have to continue their pet nutrition education with online training courses.

And Amanda’s advice for the pets at home? “Keep. Them. Busy!” She recommends toys that can hold treats, like the bestselling LickiMat, to stimulate them and keep them occupied. “A bored dog is a destructive dog,” says Amanda. Bored dogs also tend to be a little bit more anxious, for which she recommends CBD—for pets *and* their humans. It’s important to keep everyone a little less anxious these days.

*Brought to you by New Town Williamsburg—stay home, stay safe, support local business. Kit Arbuckle reporting for the New Town Commercial Association (edition 20.1).*