

*Reg Courtney's gamble paid off
only because*

THE POTENTIAL IS THERE

by THOMAS F. LAVIN

Youngster looks over tropical fish display unit designed and built by Reginald Courtney, owner of Reptile Aquatic Supply Company in New Jersey. Courtney-built displays make use of fine woods and formica to give attractive appearance.



"The pet industry is 'wide open' for the man with ideas and the will to carry them out."

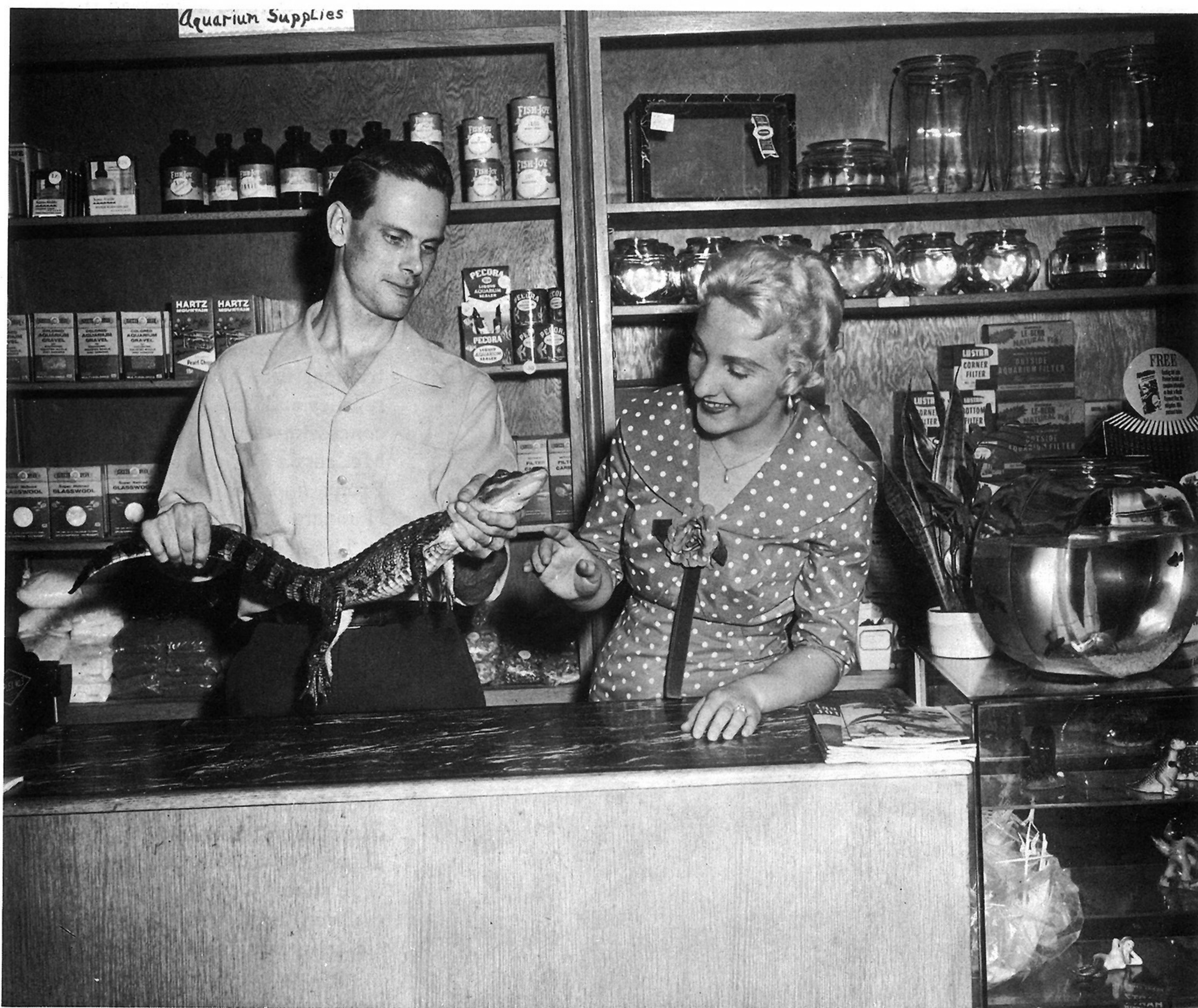
The young man expounding this philosophy from the New Jersey headquarters for his swiftly-growing business was Reginald Courtney, who ten years ago, oddly enough, had settled down to a career in an aircraft plant. He heads the Reptile Aquatic Supply Company and its subsidiary, Artistic Aquarium, in Wyckoff, New Jersey.

Starting in business with a tropical fish store in Wyckoff in 1959, Reg Courtney now has retail concessions for pets and supplies in three major department stores in the metropolitan New York area, plus his original shop and a factory where he builds custom-made aquarium units of his own design.

An idea man with a creative flair for the right move at the right time, his business has doubled in the past two years and is continuing to expand. The biggest part of this volume comes from the custom-built tanks he supplies to stores and from some "commercial" tanks, that is, units supplied to locations such as banks, department stores and public buildings.

Reginald Courtney firmly believes that imaginative, aggressive promotion and the know-how to back it up are the ingredients of success. For instance, he does not share the feeling of many small retailers that they are automatically hurt when the big stores move into the business of selling pet supplies.

He feels that the big stores can frequently get people started on their hobbies, but if a small retailer can promote the idea in every possible way that *he* is the one with the know-how, people will come to him



Reginald Courtney holds "Jenny, the talking alligator," while his wife, Rosemarie, looks on. Jenny is one of a number of attraction pieces featured by the New Jersey pet dealer. She has been featured in 27 different locations where Courtney-built aquarium units have been installed.

for the help and equipment they need and want. Another element that Reg Courtney feels is vital to the stability and success of any pet operation is diversification.

That he believes in all the ideas he has on the subject is borne out by his experience since he got his first big "break" by being laid off at the aircraft plant when business got slack. That was in 1956.

Casting about for a new start, he applied for a job as a sales representative for a wholesale tropical fish dealer. The move was a natural one. "As a boy," Reg Courtney says, "I believe I had more tropical fish than most pet shops."

After about two years of selling for someone else, he went into his own business in 1959 in Wyckoff. The store he opened is next door to the shop he now uses as central headquarters for his varied operations.

The second big "break" for Reg Courtney came after he had been in business about six months, when he gave away about \$3,000 of his own money. At the time he had been supplying tropical fish and small pets to one of the J. J. Newberry Co. stores in Long Island. In discussions with the store manager about the volume of business the store was *not* doing, Reg became convinced that the enor-

mous potential for the sale of pets and pet supplies was only being scratched.

So convinced was he that he was right — and that a change would eventually result in expanded opportunities for the Courtney firm — that he offered to build and install a complete new tank setup entirely without charge to the department store.

It was typical of Reg Courtney that he went boldly ahead in spite of comments by friends that he was out of his mind. The display was built and installed at a total cost of \$3,000, but in six weeks the volume of sales quadrupled and Newberry



Mrs. Rosemarie Courtney holds Matilda, pet monkey who entertains customers in the Artistic Aquarium. One of Matilda's favorite tricks is to unwrap sugar cubes and dump them in the Courtneys' morning coffee.

officials were so impressed that they ordered similar units for all 11 stores in their Atlantic Division. And, naturally, the Courtney-owned company built the tanks and kept them filled.

From that point on the Courtney firm highballed along with its energetic young owner as chief engineer.

The supplying of custom-built tanks continued as the major segment of the Courtney business, but he also carries on a brisk trade in tropical fish, hamsters, guinea pigs, reptiles and other small pets through concessions in the H. L. Green and McCrory's Department stores in the Bronx and the McCrory's store in Hempstead, Long Island.

Though he has had no training in design, Reg Courtney is the guiding hand behind all of the custom-built aquarium units his firm sells. He has very definite ideas as to what makes a good tank display. He makes liberal use of color, keeps the tank setups versatile, recommends that they not be allowed to go stale as to content and also sees to it that displays are compact ("store-owners want to know how much I can get into how little space").

Even after being in the business for ten years, the New Jersey dealer talks about his present career with a note of pleased surprise in his voice. Recognizing the potential in the business and the rapid progress he has already made, he has no regrets about the way things turned out.

Though the designing, building and supplying of custom-made aquarium units makes up the bulk of his business right now, he has plenty of other innovations going, many of them touching on his retail outlets. For example, from his New Jersey store he has started a tropical fish club that he believes is the first of its kind in the state.

For a \$2 yearly membership fee, members get a discount on merchandise; they also get a free tropical fish each month and have the opportunity to win free awards of merchandise completely unrelated to tropical fish or hobbies in general.

Each member of the club, to be eligible for a prize, will drop the number of his membership card into

