



## My Life in the Pet Industry - Part 3

By Steve Feinberg

We had seven Pet Circus stores. Rolf C Hagen had agreed to sell to us as a direct account.

Hagen was a company that offered lots of goods in almost every category at the time. We bought a case of everything they made for every store. The small aquarium filter parts might have been overstocked at 48 to the case each.

Soon after, Chuck and I attended the upcoming APPMA show. I believe it was in Atlanta. It was a giant convention center filled with aisle after aisle of pet supply manufacturers, large and small.

We started to walk the aisles.

The first booth we stopped at was Lambert-Kay. They were a major, well-known company. They had shampoos, chains, grooming tools, medications, wormers...you name it. They had Linatone. It was the best-selling skin and coat supplement in the industry. They also offered Avitron. It was the best-selling bird vitamin.



We were met by Henry Hirschfield. He was working the booth. Chuck said, “We would like to buy from Lambert-Kay direct”. Henry left and came back with someone who could make that decision at the time.

The decision maker asked about who we were and what we did. Chuck told him that he was the owner of Pet Circus. We had seven stores.



The guy laughed and said a seven-store chain wasn't large enough to handle direct buying. We told him we were already doing direct business with a large vendor. He asked who that was. We told him, “Hagen sells us”. We became instant Lambert-Kay distributors.

Postscript, to this day, 40 years later, I still consider Henry Hirschfield and his wife, Kim close friends.

After that, we were on a tear. At the next booth, we stopped at, it was the same scenario. Except now when asked who would sell to a seven-store chain, we were able to say Hagen and Lambert-Kay. As the day went by, the list grew longer. We placed nice orders with everyone.

Goods would start shipping right away.

We had one small dilemma. We had no warehouse.



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As soon as we returned home, the scramble was on to find a space. That day, Chuck leased a 6000 sq ft empty warehouse with a small office. It had no shelving, just an empty space.

The office was not very big. Chuck bought a huge used desk. He sat on one side, I sat on the other.

The first shipment we received was from Four Paws. By now, their product line had expanded, and we probably carried 30 or 40 products. I made neat stacks, sorted by product against the wall of the warehouse. Chuck and I looked at it. We were so proud of ourselves.

Shelving went in quickly and the warehouse filled up quickly. We sent out order sheets to the stores and began shipping from our “distribution” center. Chuck and I were unloading trucks, loading vans, picking orders, and keeping tabs on the stores.

One of the vendors who agreed to sell to us at the show was L&M Animal Farms. They supplied bird seeds, small animal feeds, and bedding. They shipped by full tractor-trailer loaded from front to back, top to bottom.

We didn't have a foot to spare in the new warehouse, and the truck was waiting. We found a huge, empty garage bay in the same building, but a few doors down and in the back. Chuck called the landlord, leased it, and a short time later, Chuck and I were hand offloading an entire trailer from L&M into the garage.



Popular product made by LM Animal Farms.

During a break, we headed out and stood in front of the warehouse. We were tired. A moment later, a young man on a bicycle was riding by. Chuck yelled out and asked if he was looking for a job. He stopped and came over. He was looking for a job. He had just gotten out of the service. Five minutes later, Chappy was unloading the trailer with us. He stayed with us for twenty years.

Chuck named the business “West Wholesale.”

Around this time, we added three more Pet Circus stores. Now, there were 10.

About a year had passed. We needed to stock up on stationary supplies for the stores. We always shopped at a place called Jaffe Stationary. They were probably about 3000 sq ft stores with most of what you might need for your office or business.

We had heard about a new office supply superstore that had just opened in Pembroke Pines and went to check it out.

We walked through the door and couldn't believe what we saw. The building was probably 30,000 square feet. It had high, open ceilings with fluorescent lighting. There were rows and rows of pallet racking. Paper was displayed by the pallet. Pens were sold in packs of 48. Everything was massive.

We bought a lot of stuff.

We loaded the van and turned north on St Rd 441. Chuck turned to me and said, "Why wouldn't that work with pet supplies?"

We talked about eliminating the time-consuming and labor-intensive aspects of running a Pet Circus. That meant no puppies. I was good with that. Initially, we would even let customers catch their own fish. (That didn't last long)

If we could keep our overhead low, we could sell at everyday, low prices.

Just load the shelves with lots of product.

I said, "Yeah! Kind of like a Pet Supermarket".

Not five minutes later, we were at a red light on the corner of St Rd 441 and Hollywood Blvd. in Hollywood, Florida. There was an older strip center on our left. Chuck glanced over and saw a for lease sign in the window of the middle space. It was about 6000 square feet. It had great visibility, a crazy busy intersection, and great parking. It also came with a nice panel on the pylon directory that could be seen in both directions. There was also a big plywood sign in the shape of an upside-down half-moon on a big facade above the doors. It said "Bountiful Foods"

Chuck said, "Let's open it right there".

He leased the space. We painted over the "Bountiful Foods" sign with white paint and painted a big, curved "Pet Supermarket" on the sign. We hung a "Coming Soon" banner right below it.

We purchased a truckload of gondolas and wall shelving. We put it up ourselves. We had fish racks built. Dog food racks lined the right side of the store. We hired help and we were ready to open.

The store was awesome.

On Grand Opening Day, there were dozens of customers waiting for us to open the doors. We were as excited as they were.

Chuck went to put the key in the door. It wouldn't budge.

It turns out that a competitor who had a small, filthy shop a few miles away was not happy to have competition. He had filled our locks with Super Glue.

But we were able to open, and we couldn't believe the results after the first month. We didn't open any more Pet Circus stores.