

WHY ARE WE SPENDING SO MUCH MONEY ON OUR PETS? IT'S COMPLICATED.

By Justine Griffin | TAMPA BAY TIMES

These days, our fur babies have their own beaches and parks. They can come with us to dinner. We can pay a little extra for some of them to sit with us on an airplane.

We spend more on our pets today—more than \$60 billion in the U.S. this year—than ever before, from outfits to organic kibble.

“Over the last decade, we’ve truly humanized our pets,” said Bob Vetere, president and CEO of the American Pet Products Association. “We’re no longer satisfied to reward them in ‘pet terms’ with something like a tennis ball. Instead we reward them in human terms, with expensive diamond-studded leashes or something, in a way that we think is rewarding.”

It makes us feel better even though they’d probably rather have the tennis ball.

But this “man’s best friend” relationship is more complex than that.

More young people are delaying starting their own families and are opting to have pets instead. And with newfound spending money, thanks to a slowly but surely improving economy, our pets are off the store-brand chow and now eat gluten-free organic food from an eco-friendly specialty pet food company.

If it’s good enough for us, it’s good enough for our pets.

We love our pets so much that niche companies have grown out of our willingness to spoil them. Take FairyTail Planning, a Tampa, Fla.-based company that launched last year and specializes in planning your dog’s role in your wedding.

“We have one client who bought her dog’s outfit for their wedding before she even started looking for her dress,” said Ilana Mobley,

co-founder of FairyTail Planning with Kelly Maronpot.

As experienced pet sitters, Mobley and Maronpot will help plan your dog’s role as a ring bearer, plan pet-friendly wedding photos and be there to watch your fur child during the reception and while you’re on your honeymoon.

“So many companies are picking up on how obsessed we are with our pets. I saw a dog in a shopping cart at Michael’s last week,” Maronpot said. “Restaurants have menus specific for dogs. There are happy hour events centered around your dog.”

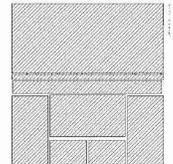
Sure, we use our pets as a socialization tool sometimes. They appear in Tinder dating app photos and lead to conversations at bars, concerts or the farmer’s market. The dog park has become a popular spot for a first date.

But in other ways, our pets become an excuse to isolate ourselves.

“But you still have to get up to take him outside, almost forcing interactions with other people that would not have otherwise taken place,” Vetere said. “We’re starting to see that more and more.”

At the end of the day, our pets do more for us than we do for them, said Kristen Levine, a Tampa-based self-proclaimed “pet expert.” The former spokeswoman for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Tampa owns and operates a public relations firm for pet-related companies.

“What it comes down to is human nature,” Levine said. “We crave that interaction we get from them, but we can’t get through text messages or email, like how we communicate with our loved ones now. It makes pets more accessible and more meaningful, in that way.”





SPENDING ON PETS, ANNUALLY, IN BILLIONS IN THE U.S.

