

Poop scoopers dig clients out of deep doo-doo

Professionals share secrets of pet projects

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Eric Hoffpauir of San Antonio, Texas's Pet Butler, snatches a fake pile of dog poop during the turd herding contest at the APAWS -- Association of Professional Animal Waste Specialists - convention held at the Riviera Saturday. Competitors tried to see who could pick up the most turds in two minutes. Las Vegas' own David Silva of Scooper Dave came in third with 32. Photo by [K.M. Cannon](#).

To shovel or to rake pooch poop, that was the question.

It's not exactly the life and death argument that Hamlet faced, and it certainly doesn't reach the epic ferocity of "tastes great" versus "less filling." But if you don't take poop scooping seriously, then you probably never have had to scoop poop for a living. About 50 professional turd herders descended on Las Vegas this weekend for the APAWS -- Association of Professional Animal Waste Specialists -- annual convention, where various techniques for removing pet waste from clients' yards were discussed, debated and laughed at.

Proponents of the rake method, such as Lee Bowling of Memphis' On Doody, argued that a rake glides through grass without causing much damage. Bowling once used the shovel method but switched to the rake because he "was tearing up the yards with the shovel." And that didn't please his customers, he said.

But Ron Vecchio of Long Island, N.Y.'s Minesweepers Pet Waste Removal couldn't disagree more. "Some people swear by it (the rake), but I don't see it," he said.

And the sticking point is ... well ... kind of squishy for Vecchio.

"You wouldn't eat soup with a fork. ... If you have a wet one, a rake just goes right through it," he said.

Vecchio is so adamant in his pro-shovel position that during a pooper-scooper contest held Saturday at the Riviera, armed only with a rake, he turned it upside down and used the handle to shovel plastic dog doo into a debris pan.

But there is a third method that, while acceptable when scooping plastic poop, raises eyebrows among veteran turd herders in real-life scenarios. Marjorie Raymond of Tampa, Fla., an employee of Yard Guards on Doody, uses her hands.

Yes, her hands are wrapped in plastic gloves, and the 27-year-old with flowing blond hair does go through "one of the big" containers of liquid hand sanitizer a week.

But "you couldn't pay me enough," said veteran Dallas pooper scooper Matt "Red" Boswell. "It's not even the bending over; it's the picking it up with your hands."

Vecchio concurred.

"Sometimes you will go in a yard and a dog will poop right in front of you. It's a disgusting job to begin with. ... I just don't think you need to be up close and personal with it," he said.

Raymond acknowledges there's a stigma attached to her method. Some people won't shake her hand, even though she insists poop has yet to contact her skin.

"It's hard to wave to people while you are doing it," she added.

The business can be fairly profitable.

Eric Hoffpauir, who has a Pet Butler franchise in San Antonio, Texas, said an average client pays about \$14 to have poop cleaned up once a week.

The price varies based on how many dogs the client owns.

With an average dog crapping 23 times a week and client lists that go into the hundreds, pooper scoopers make a decent living, he said.

Those who hire professional poop scoopers generally are people who have annoyed their neighbors with the smell or are in trouble with their home-owner's association, said Jeff Morgan, The Grand Poobah of Centennial, Colo.

Hoffpauir said some planned communities will hire professionals to clean entire neighborhoods. Some clients have let the situation get so bad, he has picked up hundreds of pounds of poop on the first day of service.

Typically, clients have little time and dual incomes, Morgan said.

The most difficult issue is making customers aware of the service. So conventions are a way these professionals can talk shop and learn marketing strategies.

Hoffpauir, who once worked for Texas Instruments, said the first advantage is that he is his own boss. Also, he loves animals and being outside.

And by most accounts, the money isn't too bad, either.

The winter is the best time to do the job, he said, because "in the summer, if you get a dog with an upset stomach ... well ... the smell can stay around for a while."

While in Las Vegas, APAWS took care of a potential client. The group purchased body armor for Nicky, a K-9 handled by Sgt. Mike Blackwell, the newest edition to the North Las Vegas Police Department.