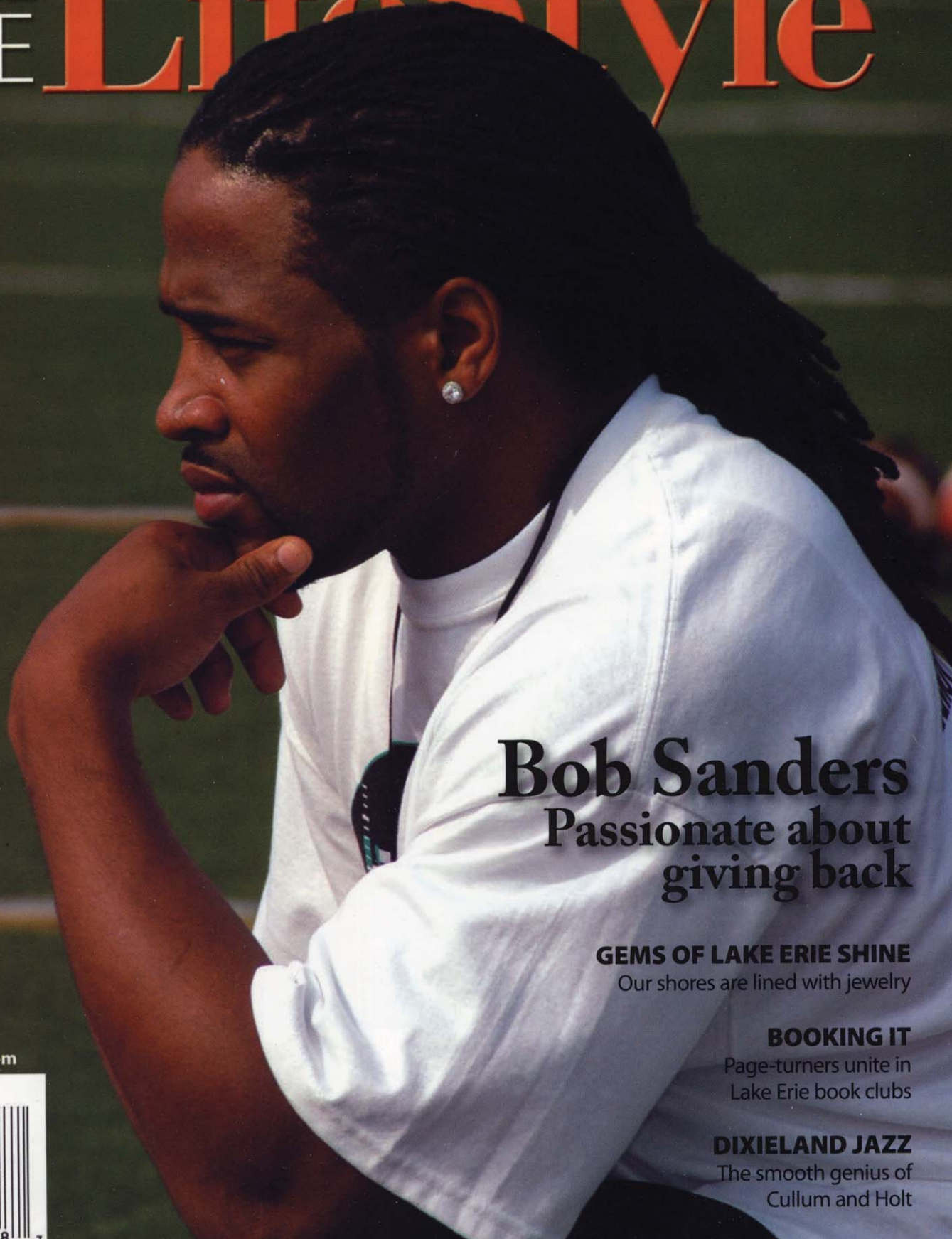


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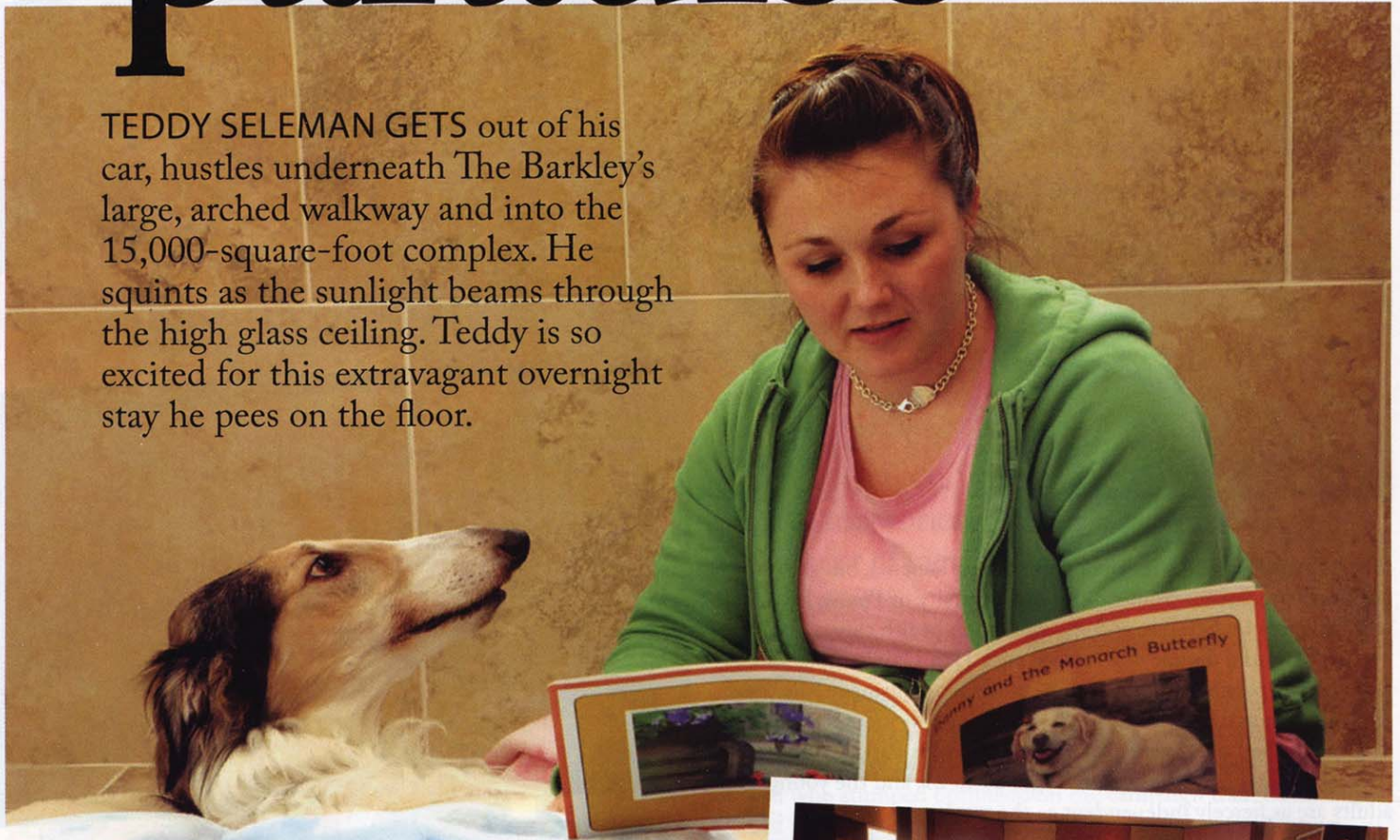
\$3.50 US



PAWS-ITIVELY paradise

Story by **Chris Crowell**
Photos courtesy of **The Barkley**

TEDDY SELEMAN GETS out of his car, hustles underneath The Barkley's large, arched walkway and into the 15,000-square-foot complex. He squints as the sunlight beams through the high glass ceiling. Teddy is so excited for this extravagant overnight stay he pees on the floor.



SNUGGLED UNDER HIS FAVORITE BLANKET, THIS BARKLEY GUEST GETS A BEDTIME STORY — ALL PART OF THE PET PACKAGE AT CLEVELAND'S UPSCALE BOARDING AND GROOMING FACILITY FOR PETS.

right: SPAAH TIME FOR PETS — JUST A SAMPLING OF THE LUXURY AT THE BARKLEY IN CLEVELAND.



The Barkley staff is prepared for this sort of thing.

"That happens 20 times a day," Barkley owner Howard Perlmutter says. Teddy had never personally peed on the floor before, but the golden retriever couldn't help himself today. The Barkley Pet Hotel & Day Spa is the only place of its kind in the entire country. Ohio Magazine recognized it as Ohio's top vacation destination for 2008, and Cleveland Magazine recognized it as the best pet spa two years in a row — a category The Barkley basically invented.

Perlmutter likes to think of his brainchild as the "Hilton for dogs." That statement, however, is not entirely accurate. How many Hiltons offer full-grooming, extra potty breaks, limo rides, bedtime stories, and — if you need

it — a good de-skunking? The Hilton should actually work to become The Barkley for people.

Perlmutter, who resembles actor Sean Astin (real life Astin, not his character in "Lord of the Rings"), thought of the idea for a swanky pet hotel and day spa, complete with pool, park and play area, while working in the music business in Los Angeles. It all started with his pal Bailey, one of his acting clients. Bailey has acted in "Saving Silverman," "Be Cool," and "Air Bud." Bailey is, of course, a dog — golden retriever to be exact. She is retired from acting now and follows Perlmutter around The Barkley all day.

"I was realizing how much money people spent on their pets," Perlmutter says. "The pet industry at the time was a \$34 billion industry, which is two billion more than the airline industry in this country." Despite the big bucks in the pet world, he noticed there was no real franchise for pet boarding and grooming. Perlmutter heard opportunity barking.



above: LIMO SERVICE IS AVAILABLE FOR YOUR PET WITH DOOR-TO-DOOR SERVICE.

top right: FELINES GET PLENTY OF PAMPERING TOO.

right: PETS CAN FEEL RIGHT AT HOME IN FRONT OF A ROARING FIREPLACE AND A TELEVISION WITH THEIR FAVORITE SHOWS.



For two years, Perlmutter conducted extensive research. He visited 200 facilities all over the country. He consulted pet architects on the best building materials. He sought out pet psychologists for the best animal treatment methods. The floor that Teddy saturated was picked specifically for its animal-soothing color and its animal-comforting surface. It's also the best floor for cleaning up pee.

But pets aren't into that stuff; they want the Frosty Paw ice cream treats and "paw"dicure bubble baths. The Barkley is about pampering. A dog like Teddy can look forward to a standard dog-grooming package that includes a shampoo, comb-out and blow-drying. If he's been extra good, Teddy's owners may tack on an anal gland cleaning, teeth-brushing, ear treatment, nail "paw"lush, relaxation massage, or facial. The health and wellness services could throw in acupuncture, some aromatherapy and a chiropractic stretching for good measure.

"Every dog is different, but it's more about how the owner responds to the 'paw'lish and stuff like that," Perlmutter says. "Because dogs are becoming humanized, the owners think that the dogs want what the owners want. Like 'what would I want if I was here?'"

Apparently some owners want a plasma screen TV (playing Animal Planet 24/7), a couch, a bed, a fireplace and a view of the pool. Those owners can fork over the \$65 a night and make it happen. But, of course, room service, tuck-in, bedtime stories and tummy-rubs will cost a little extra. For those into the true high-society doggy care experience, Perlmutter will actually send out The Barkley's limo.

"We do pick up and delivery. It's called our

trans'paw'tation," Perlmutter says. "We take dogs for rides if an owner schedules a ride. We also will take the dogs to McDonald's for a burger – with the owner's consent, of course."

Perlmutter is ready for every bark and call of even the snootiest schnauzer, but one question still sits and begs: Why Cleveland? This area is about hardworking, blue-collar people not limo-riding, diamond-studded dog collar people.

"If I opened one in Los Angeles, and it did well, what's to say it will work anywhere else?" Perlmutter says. "If I do it in L.A., it's going to cost twice as much, and even if it succeeds it's not showing me anything because it worked in L.A., where everyone would think it would work anyway. But why would it work in Cleveland, Detroit or Columbus?"

Perlmutter is from the Cleveland area and likes its proximity to other locations such as Akron, Erie, and Pittsburgh. Also the economic inadequacies of this area, even in these tough times, do not seem to translate when the love of a pet is involved. If the Barkley continues to excel in this area, Perlmutter is looking to extend The Barkley name beyond the monogram towels hanging by the pool in Cleveland, possibly into Columbus.

"That's the goal, anyway," Perlmutter says.

One can imagine the national ad campaign reading something like this: Whatever happens in The Barkley, stays in The Barkley, and whatever stays in The Barkley can pee on the floor. ■