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Neighbors Salem Section

Groomer proves to be top dog

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By Marquita Brown

The third competition was the charm **Shannon Tupes**.

Tupes, 35, competed and performed well in two other professional grooming competitions before heading to Hershey, Pa., in September for the Groom Expo. There, she won Best Profile and Best in Class in two categories. She then beat out the other 100 competitors to win Best in Show.

She also won the Professional Image Award, "which is really exceptional," said Sally Liddick, editor of Groomer to Groomer magazine, which sponsors Groom Expo. "She carried herself very, very well throughout the whole thing. She was dressed the most professionally through all of her events and projected the best image of a groomer."

Tupes said she trains for competitions by bathing and grooming dogs at About Pets Center in Salem, which she owns with her mother, **Victoria Radford**.

"This doesn't surprise us that she's this dedicated," Radford said. "You have to be very self-motivated to do that and very concerned about the well-being of your clients."

That concern began years ago, when Tupes said she couldn't find a good groomer for her Yorkshire terrier. She decided to do the work herself, taking grooming classes and eventually opening the posh pet spa.

She went on to become a certified master groomer through the International Professional Groomers Inc. Certification is voluntary and it shows a groomer is "willing to stay current with grooming trends, maintain a level of safety, breed knowledge and professionalism," said Judy Kurpiel, president of the Illinois-based organization.

Tupes works 12 hours a day pampering her clients, often giving them treats. She'll allow herself some "excursions" some weekends, but even those are work-related trips to grooming competitions or conferences.

"They're treated like children," Tupes said about the dogs at the center as she snipped the fur of Trappie, the bichon fries she groomed at the competition.

Trappie resembled an oversized cotton ball. The dog stood like a statue as Tupes snipped around his face and tail. When she left the room, he immediately flopped down on the table, standing and wagging his tail only when she returned.

At competitions, judges watch for a dog's behavior and rapport with the groomer. But that's no problem for Tupes.

In less than an hour, she had trimmed the claws of a trembling Chihuahua named Pete, shaped Trappie's head into a perfect ball, trimmed the coat of a cocker spaniel named Pierre and made Chester, a plump mixed breed, shine.

Tupes plans to return to Pennsylvania next year and compete in all four categories with Trappie, Pierre, her standard poodle named Katie, and McKinley Gunter, a Westie who competed and won this year.