

Left: Kris Rotonda, Denise Fernandez, and xxxxxx and xxxxx, two of their four dogs.

# Entrée-pawneers

REBECCA BRITAIN

## Costco couple starts businesses dog lovers and dogs will love

COSTCO MEMBER DENISE Fernandez and her fiancé, Kris Rotonda, are seriously smitten with puppy love. Early in 2014, the couple, who live in Clearwater, Florida, launched You Must Love Dogs Dating ([youmustlovedogsdating.com](http://youmustlovedogsdating.com)), a dating site that brings dog lovers together. About six months later they followed up with the Doggy Cooking Network on YouTube. Their show walks dog owners through the preparation of simple, healthful recipes for their pets (they purchase many of the ingredients at Costco) in much the same way that other popular cooking shows help people learn to cook for themselves and their families. Neither Rotonda nor Fernandez is a professional chef, but Rocky, Coco, Kobe and Jordan, the couple's four dogs, taste-test each recipe.

Rotonda, who pampers his canine companions with home cooking on weekends, has been around dogs most of his life. "Rocky is my lifelong dog," he says. "I got him when I was 8 years old. He is 20 years old and still moves very well. That would be 140 in dog years." He says he started cooking for his dogs because he knows it's healthier for them and says it is just plain fun. Fernandez, on the other hand, had never owned a dog when she met Rotonda. But, as she and Rotoanda grew close, her love of dogs took root. "She is a true blessing and now a big dog lover," Rotonda says.

### The Costco Connection

In addition to carrying most ingredients for homemade pet food, Costco offers a variety of high-quality cat and dog foods specifically targeted to your pet's age, weight and other health needs.

The couple's latest business, PupPot ([pup-pot.com](http://pup-pot.com)), a cooking, serving and storage system for preparing the homemade meals they create on the Doggy Cooking Network, is the "next logical step" in their current entrepreneurial path. The PupPot system consists of a 3.8-quart stainless steel cooking pot, a paw-shaped serving base and two serving and storage bowls. Rotonda and Fernandez also put together an e-book with recipes.

"I figured that if Denise and I were teaching people to cook for their dogs, it just made sense to provide them with the right tools," says Rotonda, who made his living in commercial real estate until he started to devote his energy to dog-related ventures. The couple, who will marry in October, plan to expand their cooking line to cats, and will eventually offer PupPots in all sizes to accommodate pet owners with dogs of any breed.—Will Fifield



### Bacon Rice Cakes

- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- 2 slices lean bacon, cooked and finely chopped (retain bacon fat)
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup dried bread crumbs

1. Mix rice and chopped bacon.
2. Add egg and bread crumbs to rice and bacon mixture. Combine thoroughly. Wet hands to prevent sticking, then form the egg-rice mixture into 4 thin patties.
3. Reheat the bacon fat in a skillet over medium heat. Add the rice cakes and cook, turning once, until golden brown—about 4 minutes on each side.



### Chicken Cakes

- ½ cup cooked brown rice
- ¼ cup frozen peas, thawed
- ⅓ cup shredded rotisserie chicken
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons plain bread crumbs
- ½ teaspoon dried parsley
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1. In a medium bowl, stir together the rice, peas, chicken, egg, bread crumbs and parsley. Form into 4 equal patties.
2. In a skillet, heat olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the chicken patties and cook, turning once, until golden brown—approximately 7 to 8 minutes total. Remove from the skillet and let cool slightly.

GRAPHICS: CHRIS A. RUSNAK



### St. Puppy's Day Hash

- 2 baking potatoes (1 to 1 ½ pounds), peeled and shredded
- Sea salt
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- ½ cup shredded carrot
- ¾ cup chopped corned beef
- ½ cup of half-and-half

- ¼ cup grated cheese
- Ground pepper
- 4 large eggs, scrambled

1. Place the potatoes in a colander, lightly salt and set aside.
2. Melt butter in a pot over medium heat. Mix in the potatoes, carrot and corned beef. Increase the heat to medium-high. Cover pot. Stir every 5 minutes. Cook until potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes.
3. Stir in half-and-half and turn off heat. Season with pepper and cheese.
4. Top hash with the cooked eggs.