

They call it puppy love

By Tom Dalton

Staff writer

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Larry Reardon bought his best girl a pink fleece jacket for Valentine's Day but didn't buy a gift for his wife. That was OK with his wife — she also bought gifts for the same girl.

"I really don't get anything for my wife, and my wife doesn't get anything for me," the Salem resident said. "We just get some things for the kids."

The "kids" are Geri, a 1-year-old female schnoodle the couple adopted from the Northeast Animal Shelter in Salem, and Dublin, a 2-year-old male pug. Nothing is too good, Reardon said, for their two little dogs.

"These are like our kids ... right now," said the 25-year-old newlywed, "so we pretty much pamper them ... like you would a child."

The Reardons are not alone.

Although Valentine's Day is not the four-legged shopping frenzy that Christmas has become, it is a holiday that is rising on the retail charts, according to North Shore pet store owners.

"Last weekend was our Valentine's Day weekend, and the dog store did double what Coon's did," said Karen Caccavaro, who owns two Salem stores — Coon's Card and Gift Shop and Penelope's Pet Boutique, which is where the Reardons bought the pink fleece jacket.

Many pet stores sell special Valentine's Day gifts, including heart-shaped dog treats, heart-shaped catnip toys, tuxedo vests, leashes and collars decorated with hearts, and lots of valentine clothing.

"All our heart sweaters and coats are pretty much sold out," said Janet Keohane, owner of Dog Spa in Beverly.

Pawsitively Marblehead, a pet gift store, goes all out. For Valentine's Day, it has "rhinestone bling for that special 4-legged friend," according to a promotion.

"I sold two sterling silver heart charms that we monogrammed with the dog's name," said Susie Leahy of Pawsitively Marblehead.

Another customer walked into the Marblehead store this week and bought a popular T-shirt that expresses the dog's love for its owner. Printed on the shirt are the words, "I Woof You."

Dulcie DeCillis has been busy baking dog cookies for Valentine's Day. She recently opened The Dog Bowl, a

"gourmet" dog food store in Peabody and has heart-shaped treats for sale.

"Our favorite ones are peanut butter and carrot. The dogs absolutely love them," she said.

Caccavaro has three dogs and two cats of her own and isn't surprised that people are going ape on Valentine's Day. Those little pets, she said, are like best friends.

"People love their pets, and they want to give back what they get from their pets," she said.

"I have customers say, 'They're not my dogs, they're my children,'" DeCillis said.

Dog and cat lovers are the first to admit they are crazy about their pets and, on occasion, go a little overboard. Valentine's Day is one of those occasions.

Karen Callahan, who owns a Beverly business, bought valentine sweaters with pink hearts at Dog Spa for Boo and Bella, 6-month-old Havanese puppies. The dogs, by the way, have their own Web site.

"I'm so crazy over these two dogs," said Callahan, the mother of six human children. "These are the new loves of my life. ... I will get them jewelry eventually, but I think they're too young."

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Photos



Karen Callahan bought Valentine's Day sweaters at Dog Spa in Beverly for her two dogs, Bella and Boo. Staff photo



Dulcie DeCillis, owner of The Dog Bowl in Peabody, shows off Valentine's Day gifts for dogs. Staff photo