



Vasi Siedman | Submitted

## From puppy mill to runway in less than a year

Pearl the pomeranian, owned by Cheryl Bauer of White Bear Lake, won America's Top Dog Model 2016. The theme was "Meet the Paw-litician"

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By Debra Neutkens/Editor | 0 comments

Pearl is now a top model.

The Pomeranian was selected as America's Top Dog Model 2016 after her White Bear Lake owner, Cheryl Bauer, entered her pet in the contest. The theme was "Meet the Paw-litician."

Contestants were selected for best portrayal of their favorite politician, past or present, that included photos and essay. The winning entry from Bauer told a heartfelt story about rescue from a puppy mill and why Pearl feels a kinship to President Abraham Lincoln.

"Pearl feels a kinship to Abe in his belief of freedom and his love of animals," read the essay.

The national contest was held by America's Top Dog Model, a Boca Raton, Florida-based business that describes itself as a luxury brand whose mission is to celebrate dogs that make a difference in people's lives. All about canines, it publishes an annual calendar and books, broadcasts a TV show, and operates a modeling agency and online store. The business was created by Jo Jo Harder, whom Bauer first met during a 2014 Marketfest event at Lulu & Luigi.

Bauer happens to spend winters about 30 miles from Boca Raton in Lantana, Florida, so Harder invited her and Pearl to a casting call at a South Florida Pet Expo for the top model contest.

Bauer didn't know if her 6-year-old Pomeranian would be ready for the limelight. She was a puppy mill rescue that would likely need time to adjust to life outside a cage.

"A lot of rehab goes into those dogs," Bauer said. "She frightened easily and didn't know how to eat from a bowl. I was warned it could take two years to bond with Pearl. We bonded in two weeks. She's a fabulous little dog."

Puppy mill dogs learn from other dog(s) in the home, which was a requirement in the adoption process. Bauer has a senior Pomeranian named Kirby who helped with Pearl's rehab. He's a registered therapy dog familiar to residents at St. Andrew's Village and children who attend the Wildwood library Doggone Reading program.

Bauer got Pearl in August and left for Florida in December. The casting call was in March.

In May, Bauer got the call that Pearl won the contest.

As the grand prize winner, Pearl will appear on the cover of a Top Dog calendar and receive custom jewelry for pets, a tiara, a one-year supply of treats and an autographed copy of "How to Become a Top Dog Model."