

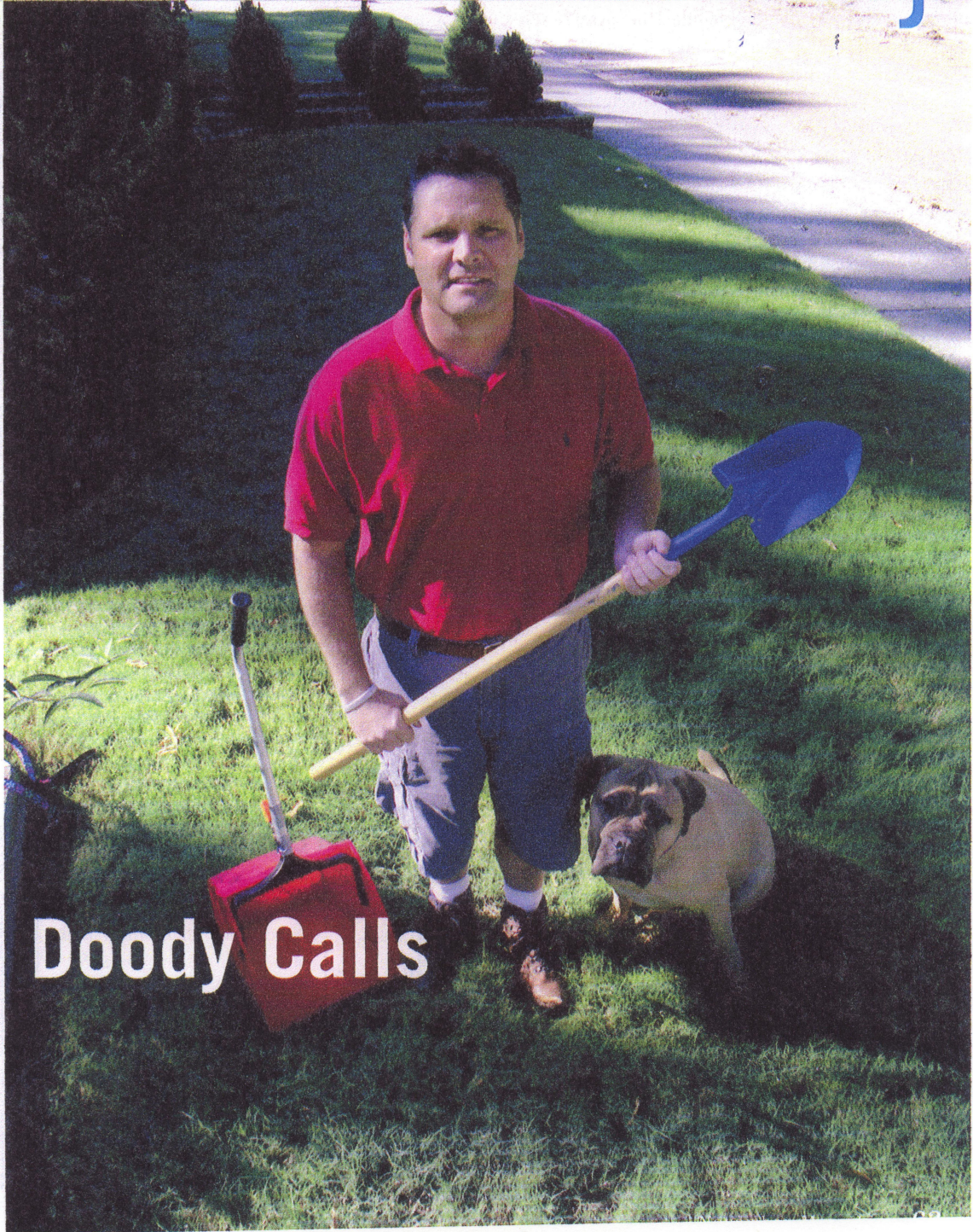
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(Not Exactly) Business As Usual

business is picking up these days for Lee Bowling. The former banking officer is the owner of On Doody, Memphis' only pet-waste removal service. "It's not always a pleasant thing, but somebody has to do it," he says. "Our goal is to make life — and yards — more enjoyable for everyone, and to give animals a nicer environment." A graduate of University of Tennessee-Martin with a degree in management, Bowling was working in the loan division at National Bank of Com-

merce when the bank was sold to Virginia-based Suntrust and the employees in his division were laid off. That's when he contacted his friend, Drew Phillips, who had founded On Doody here in 1999. "Drew saw the need here and started it with a few customers, and had been building it year by year since then," says Bowling. "He was looking for something else to do, so I decided to purchase the company from him."

Lee Bowling: *On Doody* }



Lee Bowling makes life easier — and cleaner — for pet owners.
By Michael Singer

When Doody Calls

Bowling bought On Doody in June 2005 and operates it from his home in Cordova. Overhead is low. At the moment, he employs three subcontractors who use their own vehicles and equipment.

"They carry a shovel and one of those flat scoops like ushers use in movie theaters to sweep up popcorn," says Bowling. "We scoop up the waste either once or twice a week, depending on the customer's preference, bag it, and dispose of it in a rented dumpster. Then we disinfect all our tools before moving on to the next yard."

Bowling says he asked city officials if he could just dump the waste in his own curbside garbage can, but they nixed that idea when he told them the amount — more than 300 pounds of poop per week.

At the moment, On Doody's only "customers" are canine, but Bowling says he is considering coming into homes and cleaning cat litter boxes.

There have been a few run-ins, he admits, with some pets who don't appreciate having a stranger in their backyard. "Some of our people have gotten a few nips, but we're all dog lovers, and we've never had a dog we couldn't handle," he says. "Besides, most of our customers know our schedule and will keep their dogs inside, or at least tied up, when we come by."

Bowling's employees do not carry Mace or sprays with them, and they do not even give treats to dogs in attempts to befriend them. "That's not a good idea, because then the dog might be tempted to be friendly to a burglar who gives them a treat, too," he says. "Also, some of these animals may be on a special diet."

At the moment, On Doody has 135 customers, and Bowling hopes to double that by June 2006. Based on similar companies in other cities, he says, "My business goal is to eventually have 2,500 to 5,000 customers." The fee is \$11 per week for one dog, and \$3 for each

additional animal.

Bowling has a sense of humor about the nature of his business. "We've toyed with various slogans: 'We're number one and number two' and 'We are the 'pooperazzi' — that sort of thing," he laughs. And if he's not in when clients call, the answering machine message declares, "Sorry we missed you. We are out in the doody patch."

"It's really a very simple business, but it's hard to get started," says Bowling. "You won't make it by just having three or four customers. I was lucky to get into the business after it was already up and running." It helps that the majority of his clients are located along the Poplar corridor, all the way from Cordova to Harbor Town, so his employees don't have to drive all over the city.

Dog owners hear about the service primarily by word of mouth, though Bowling maintains visibility in the community by cleaning up waste each week in the dog-run area of the Memphis/Shelby County Humane Society — at no cost — and at upcoming dog shows.

"The worst thing you can do is let dog waste just collect in your yard," he explains. "People think it dissolves after a rain and acts like manure, but it's not grain-based like horse manure. Most dog food is meat-based, so you are basically letting piles of meat decay in your yard." That can not only lead to the spread of disease, but it can attract rats and other vermin.

Bowling has discovered he has two basic types of customers. "We have the men, who are tired of devoting a half-hour to this, week after week," he says. "And then we have the women, who are tired of trying to get their husbands to devote a half-hour to this, week after week. So we step in and solve that problem."

He leans back from his laptop computer and smiles. "I guess one sideline to this business is marriage counseling." **M**