

Dog Cloning Becomes Business

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A Korean biomedical company has received an order to clone a pet dog, the first commercial dog cloning in the world.

The company, RNL Bio, said earlier this week that it is cloning a pit bull-terrier for a Bernann McKinney, a woman living in California, using tissue from her dead pet named Booger for \$150,000. It is planning to deliver the clone in February next year.

The cloning will be conducted by a research team from Seoul National University, while RNL Bio is in charge of business operations. The firm's CEO expects as many as 500 orders within a few years from rich pet owners in the United States, Japan and Europe.

“We have been focusing on cloning specialized dogs such as narcotic detection dogs. But we won't refuse orders for pet dogs,” said CEO Ra Jeong-chan. “There are many people who want to clone their pet dogs in Western countries even at this high price.”

He said pet cloning has the potential to become a burgeoning industry. “I believe we can greatly lower the cost of cloning if we can double the yield (of fertilized eggs),” he said.

The Seoul National University team produced the world's first cloned dog, Snuffy, in 2005. But it was also disciplined by the university for fabricating and using incorrect data in research papers regarding human embryo and wolf cloning.

To clone Booger, the researchers have used cells taken from its ear tissue and inserted them into ova which were then implanted into eight female dogs, Ra said. The surrogate mothers were not the same breed as this was unnecessary, Ra said. The dog cloning was verified through independent testing.

Pet cloning was initiated in the United States when a cat called Nicky was cloned for a woman at a cost of \$50,000, one third the price of “Booger Jr.” The same Texan company, Genetic Savings & Clone, tried to clone a hunting dog for \$5 million as its next project, but closed down in 2006 before doing so.

Ra said that Booger's owner had preserved the ear tissue for more than a year at minus 200 degrees in a U.S. laboratory, while seeking firms that could clone the dog.

“It seems that she has a disability and her dog helped her cope with the problem, so she was eager to get a clone of Booger,” he said.

