



Susan George of Pet Taxi not only gets Shrimpy to the groomer, but also provides bottled water. Sacramento Bee/Brian Baer

In trendy L.A., gofers aren't just for celebs

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Angelenos can call a chauffeur for their sheepdog, get gourmet grub for a getaway or hire a hairdresser who makes house calls.

They can also "Rent-A-Husband" for chores or get their own "Girl Friday."

They know not everyone living in La-La Land can be a movie star. But Angelenos can be treated like one if they have a telephone and a credit card.

This city's overworked and well-heeled residents have created a booming market for a service industry that goes far beyond what can be found in Sacramento or many other parts of the country.

"You have the movie industry, a constantly growing city and one of the richest cities in the United States," said Lisa Ristorucci, founder of Gofer Girls, an errand service. "It's a city wrapped up in looks, what's new and trendy and hip. And we happen to be that right now."

With her company, customers can have their cake ordered, delivered and eat it, too. Or they can get errands done for \$30 an hour. Ordinary Angelenos can act like any Hollywood bigwig by hiring a personal assistant for \$37 an hour through "I Need an Assistant." Or they can conjure up a romantic getaway or over-the-top wedding proposal with "Go Get It!"

"I build them what will be one of the most important moments in their relationship," said Go Get It! founder Jenifour Jones.

With operations in several cities, Jones staged a play for one Prince Charming, who appeared as a character in a frog suit and popped the question to his bride-to-be. Jones swooped another bride-to-be off for a day of pampering and delivered her to the beach at sunset for her suitor's proposal. And she developed an elaborate mystery day for a detective novel fan, complete with a shopping spree for a new "disguise."

"It makes you feel good when someone calls you afterwards and says, 'This was one of the most magical nights of my life,' " Jones said.

For men still looking for those magical nights, "Lady Wingmen" promises to help find that special someone for \$50 an hour in Los Angeles and other cities.

The company sends an attractive woman to serve as the man's "wingman" by accompanying him to his favorite hot spot. The woman strikes up conversations with other attractive ladies and then introduces the male customer as a "friend."

Owner Michael Chau has hired students, actresses, models and even a stand-up comic to work as "Lady Wingmen." He said the "Lady Wingmen" are outgoing and able to put other women so at ease they feel comfortable meeting a new man.

"L.A. is a really good city for this because you always hear about so many lonely hearts in L.A. and so many people moving to L.A. who don't know the scene," he said.

Jessica Cronin, co-owner of LA Girl Friday, said the city's long commutes also keep errand services like hers in business.

She hires schoolteachers on summer break and struggling actors to work part time, and charges \$50 an hour to pick up the dry cleaning, wait for the cable installer, shop for groceries or perform other tasks. "People spend so much time sitting in traffic, they just don't have time to get this stuff done," she said. "It's worth paying for it."

Los Angeles travelers who face long flights with little or no food service have been willing to pay nearly \$30 apiece for SkyMeals gourmet treats. This only-in-L.A. service prepares first-class meals that meet today's security requirements and delivers the food in a black carry-on bag to customers' hotels, homes or the airport.

"This is one of the things you don't know you are looking for until you find it," said SkyMeals owner Richard Katz.

Shad Meshad didn't know he was looking for a chauffeur for his pampered pooch before a friend told him about Pet Taxi. Now he relies on the service to transport his male mutt, Shrimpy, to the groomer or the airport to catch a flight to meet Meshad on out-of-town trips.

"I travel a lot," said Meshad, president of the National Veterans Foundation. "I'm a bachelor. I live alone, and my dog is like my best buddy."

Pet Taxi charges a minimum of \$45 an hour and transports almost any domestic pet -- even a pot-bellied pig with a urinary tract infection that needed to go to the veterinarian.

"He was good, but he smelled," said Pet Taxi owner Susan George. "He really smelled." She said she's transported pets to Cybill Shepherd and Al Pacino. But most customers are ordinary people, like Meshad, who love their pets.

"I'm not a celebrity," said Meshad. "But you feel like one, the way they treat you."

Celebrities have long enjoyed at-home hairstyling from some of the city's swankiest salons. Now more of these stylists are making house calls for more mundane manes. Katsumi Kasai, a stylist to the stars, will arrive with

his shears in hand, if the houses are near his South Bay home. He also travels to San Francisco, New York and Hawaii for special customers.

"I have people who will have like eight people show up in one place" for a hair-cutting party, he said.

Joseph Mattucci, who was once a tailor to celebrities, makes house or office calls for alterations or to measure for a new suit. The Redondo Beach tailor said he doesn't charge more for his on-site service. But his handmade suits cost \$2,000.

"It's mostly businessmen who don't have time to go anyplace, and they want to get better service," he said.

Better service is the selling point for "Rent-A-Husband," a national franchise providing skilled handymen to fix a faucet or make other simple repairs.

At a minimum of \$85, it may cost more to rent a husband than to use the one at home. But renting a husband ensures those "honey do" lists get done.

"We are all tall, dark and handy," said Kaile Warren, Rent-A-Husband founder.

The ultimate in all these services may be Mint Lifestyle, a Los Angeles-based travel and concierge service that caters to the rich but not necessarily the famous around the world.

Membership is by invitation or referral, and costs \$20,000 a year. But Mint Lifestyle promises the first-class service celebrities enjoy. The company claims it can snag a table at the hottest restaurants, score the best tickets for sold-out events and even find the new Sony PlayStation 3 that's in such short supply that gamers camped out to buy it.

Steven MacGeachy, one of Mint Lifestyle's founders, said he even found a Stradivarius violin for one client. The company limits its clientele and has even fired some members for being too difficult. Other companies said they occasionally run into difficult or overly demanding clients, and several said they won't help celebrities because the stars expect too much.

Most of the companies also said they have refused some requests. Cronin, at Girl Friday, for instance, wouldn't search for someone's missing brother because she didn't have the necessary skills.

Gofer Girls don't clean or cook but will recommend someone. "I Need an Assistant" founder Debbie Stevens said she's refused requests to remove bugs or rodents. "I had another guy ask me to go under his house, and I don't do that either," she said.

What each of these services do offer is the one thing almost all well-to-do Angelenos lack: time.

Whether the company shuttles Shih Tzus or delivers airport takeout, runs errands or hustles dates, each claims to give its clients what they want and to save customers time on the phone and on the freeways.

That, they say, is what keeps their customers coming back.

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