

New Spay-Neuter Mobile Clinic Tours New York

Low-income residents of New York City will have access to a roving spay-neuter truck courtesy of the ASPCA.

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Stephen Musso, the ASPCA's head of programs in New York City (left), poses with Stephen Sander (right), a native New Yorker who donated money for the third mobile spay-neuter clinic. Tuesday morning, July 17, 2007, New York City's branch of the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) unveiled its third mobile spay-neuter veterinary clinic that will serve the five boroughs' low-income pet owners, feral cat populations and animal shelters that provide adoption placement.

In operation seven days a week, the 685-square-foot truck will visit some of the city's neediest populations to offer reduced or free spay and neuter services, says Stephen Musso, executive vice president and chief of operations for New York City programs at ASPCA.

At 37-feet long, it comes equipped with a surgery table, 23 cages for recovering animals, counters for prep, sanitation stations, a bathroom, microwave, and a CD player for both the animals' and humans' listening pleasure. Each mobile unit is staffed by one veterinarian and two technicians. At busy stops a public greeter joins the group to organize the day's schedule and talk to pet owners.

The space and facilities allow staff to operate on one animal, while another prepares for surgery and a third recovers.

Funds to purchase the \$200,000 custom-made 2007 Isuzu truck came from Stephen Sander, a self-described "animal freak" and former Wall Street executive who grew up around the corner from the ASPCA's headquarters on East 92nd Street. Donated in honor of his recently deceased 14-year-old Pit Bull, Sander says spay-neuter programs "get at the source of the unwanted animal problem" and help "reduce future animal cruelty."

The nonprofit says the addition of the third mobile clinic in a decade will give it the capability to spay or neuter up to 75 animals per day or almost 30,000 per year. Organizers hope to meet a goal of roughly half that – 18,000 animals spayed or neutered in the next year. Last year it says it provided about 12,000 free and low-cost spay-neuter surgeries with its two trucks.

Visiting 18 locations each week, the mobile spay-neuter clinics make regular stops in low-income housing areas, particularly those with a majority of the population living well below the poverty line, says Joel Lopez, outreach coordinator for the mobile unit program. Stops might include community parks, public housing projects, schools, libraries, or animal shelters. A large majority of the locations are in either Brooklyn or the Bronx.

To apply for free spay-neuter surgery, pet owners must provide proof of public assistance, such as food stamps, disability, welfare, or Medicaid or Medicare. Without proof of assistance, a \$25 fee is requested.

The new mobile clinic is a move toward realizing ASPCA's goal to make New York a no-kill city, says Musso. Still, "demand for [spay-neuter] services exceeds our capabilities," he says.