

DAILY NEWS

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Vets going mobile

Tricked-out van's offering low-cost care to pet owners

BY AMY SACKS
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

FOR THE PAST three weeks, Carmen Garcia has been worried sick about Drama, her 11-year-old pit bull who has been losing weight, urinating frequently and is covered with a blotchy red skin rash.

With no extra money to pay for veterinary care, the unemployed Bronx resident believed her only option would be to surrender the sickly dog to a city shelter.

"That would have been my last choice, but I didn't want to watch her die at home," said Garcia, 44, who has cared for Drama since she was a puppy. "I have so much love for her and I don't want to get rid of her."

Now a new medical program will offer Garcia and other cash-strapped city pet owners a ray of hope and a chance to keep their pets a part of the family.

Today, Drama will be among a dozen cats and dogs scheduled to receive medical care at the city's first low-cost mobile veterinary clinic, which will make its debut at noon outside the Manhattan Animal Care & Control shelter on E. 110th St.

The well-equipped vet-mobile has been designed to keep New Yorkers of limited incomes from having to surrender their pets to already overcrowded shelters.

"I expect the program will prevent approximately 5,000 surrenders over the course of a year," said Garo Alexanian, founder of Companion Animal Network, who created and funded the program.

The 21-foot van, equipped with a diagnostics lab and X-ray machine, will be staffed by a handful of local veterinarians who will provide affordable care for maladies ranging from ear infections to dental problems, including \$25 exams and \$10 vaccinations. Spay and neuter surgery will not be provided.

For now, the van will be parked outside the Manhattan ACC shelter on Saturdays and at the Brooklyn ACC shelter, located at 2336 Linden Blvd., on Wednesdays, from noon to 6 p.m.



It's hunting season for adopters looking for cute kittens like this threesome at Manhattan Care and Control shelter. Photo by Michael Ip

In time, Alexanian hopes to expand the program to other boroughs. Its success, however, will rely on generous donations from pharmaceutical companies, private donors and pet food companies, he said. Expanding the program will also require more veterinarians to sign on.

The timing couldn't be better, said ACC spokesperson Richard Gentles.

It's kitten season, the time of year when thousands of unsprayed cats give birth, flooding animal shelters with homeless litters, he pointed out.

The ACC shelters currently have between 400 and 500 cats that need homes, including 10 nursing moms and their litters. Shelters and rescue groups across the city are in desperate need of adopters and volunteers to foster kittens too young to be adopted.

Volunteer foster homes outside the shelter environment also are needed to help protect nursing mothers from possible illness and infection. And senior cats, often overlooked by adopters when kittens are in abundance, also need homes.

In an effort to free up their cages for other animals, today through Labor Day ACC shelters will be offering free adoptions of cats older than 1.

During today's events, vaccinations for dogs and cats will be available for \$10 at the vet-mobile, and the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals will offer \$10 micro-chipping for cats and dogs.

For information on the low-cost vet-mobile, call (718) 544-7387. For info on adoption, go to www.nycacc.org or www.animalalliancencyc.org.

amy.sacks@gmail.com