

A Dog's—and Cat's—Best Friend

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Vet's non-profit helps protect the city's most vulnerable

By [Regina Molaro](#)

Through his work with The Toby Project, Dr. Andrew Kaplan is doing his share to eradicate pet overpopulation in New York City.

Kaplan, 46, is also the founder of City Veterinary Care, the Upper West Side's source for medical care and treatment for dogs and cats. He founded The Toby Project, a non-profit dedicated to eradicating pet overpopulation in the city, a few years ago. Kaplan was awarded a WESTY Award for the work he has done through The Toby Project.

The project provides free and low-cost spaying and neutering for dogs and cats in low-income communities. In an effort to reduce animal shelter populations, the group's mobile surgical truck travels from neighborhood to neighborhood trying to prevent the breeding of animals who might otherwise end up in the shelter system, in peril of termination should no adoptive home be found for them.

"This country has a dramatic pet population problem, whereby the supply of dogs and cats heavily outweighs the demand," Kaplan said. "The way our shelters 'address' this problem is to adopt out however many they can and, sadly enough, kill the rest... It is well-documented that low-income areas contribute the most pets to municipal shelters, so we bring the surgical trucks directly to them for spay/neuter and effectively limit reproduction."

Without the availability of such free and low-cost services, it is likely that many residents of these communities would not be able to afford to spay/neuter their pets.

Kaplan, whose veterinary clinic promotes education, explains that spaying female dogs early in life also markedly reduces the risk of breast cancer. Male dogs that are neutered early are less likely to develop prostate cysts and infections, he said. Those same male dogs are easier to train.

It is very rewarding for Kaplan to know that the work he is doing through The Toby Project is making a difference. The organization received its non-profit status in 2005, and launched the first, and only, truck in February 2009. Since then, the group has

succeeded in performing nearly 5,000 surgeries. “We have a lot more to do, but we’re doing what we know works when it comes to reducing the shelter population,” said Kaplan, who reports that each year in the U.S., about 5 million animals lives’ are taken. Through his work, Kaplan aims to perform 25,000 surgeries per year and expand the service so that his non-profit organization can eventually provide full-time services to each borough of New York City.

“I love animals and it pains me to think of all these healthy dogs and cats dying every day for lack of homes,” said Kaplan. This all came out of the veterinarian’s love for Toby, a mixed-breed that he adopted from a shelter the day he was scheduled to be killed. This passionate animal lover and animal-welfare advocate also shares his home with Griff, another mixed-breed dog.

During his leisure time, Dr. Kaplan enjoys a variety of hobbies, including skiing, swimming, hiking, camping, cycling and sailing. He is also fond of New York City’s lively culture. He has been a resident of the Upper West Side for 10 years and a business owner for seven.