

Columbus Dog Connection Keeps on Truckin' Toward Goal

The organization's mobile spay/neuter operation will travel across Ohio to end animal homelessness.

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Director Kellie DiFrischia (right) and head veterinarian Jamey Beinlich lean on the group's new mobile unit, which could allow up to 30 animals a day to be spayed or neutered. The \$190,000 truck is "a self-sufficient, fully-stocked veterinary office," Beinlich said.

While circling the Columbus Dog Connection's new mobile spa and neuter truck, Director Kellie DiFrischia tells the name and story behind every animal depicted in larger-than-life size on the vehicle. Most of the stray dogs and cats pictured were placed with a loving family, but the purpose of the truck is to help as many animals as possible via spaying or neutering.

"Our goal is to go out of business," DiFrischia said. Columbus has the second-highest number of veterinarians per capita in the U.S., DiFrischia said, and the \$190,000 truck made by La Boit Inc. Specialty Vehicles will focus on rural counties in Ohio that have high animal populations but few opportunities for sterilization.

Later this month, the truck will make a trip to Morgan County, located about 80 miles east of Columbus and with a population of 15,000. Additional rural counties in the east and south of the state also will be targeted.

Inside the truck, known as "The Andy" in memory of a dog owned by long-time CDC supporters who wish to be anonymous, are 27 kennels, an anesthetic machine, autoclave and surgery center. "It's a self-sufficient, fully-stocked veterinary office," said Jamey Beinlich, the program's head veterinarian.

Sterilization costs start at around \$50, and the goal is for two or three veterinarians to spay or neuter 30 animals a day up to five times a week. DiFrischia said the only way to combat animal homelessness is mass sterilization efforts and envisions a fleet of five trucks canvassing Ohio someday.

Sponsorship opportunities exist for those who would like to add their name to the truck or even sponsor an entire day's worth of spays or neuters. Only sterilization and basic services such as vaccines will be available in the truck, and DiFrischia said it won't compete with local veterinarians, only providing services to those who would not have access otherwise.

"For a lot of these animals, we may be the only veterinarian they ever see," Beinlich said. Another vehicle that will aid in the CDC's mission is a donated 1993 Ford Aerostar van that will be used to transport large amounts of dog food and other supplies CDC distributes to rescue groups.

Additional donations to the van, totaling \$6,300, include tires from Pep Boys, graphics from Lizard Skinz, and maintenance by N.A.S. Car Garage that grew after the van was stolen and recovered with additional damage.

The last year has been an exhausting time for the Columbus Dog Connection, now in its 13th year. Before receiving the vehicles, the nonprofit group moved from DiFrischia's garage to its own facility near the airport on Johnstown Road. "We knew we were going to work this hard for 20 more years and we needed to work more efficiently," DiFrischia said. For more information, visit the website ColumbusDogConnection.com