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Dr. Kelly Fox examines Carmen Afanador's Pomeranian in the Lipsey Clinic at the SPCA Serving Erie County in West Seneca. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Lipsey Clinic fills a need with low-cost vet care at SPCA

By Barbara O'Brien | *Published 11:06 a.m. May 24, 2018* |

Veterinarian Dr. Helene Chevalier likes to talk about the man who had been out of work for a year. He had just gotten a new job, but his dog had developed a severe skin disease, and he couldn't afford to get it treated.

He took it back to the SPCA Serving Erie County, where he had adopted it several years ago, with the intention of surrendering it. That's when staff members worked with him, and told him about the agency's new Lipsey Clinic, which offers low-cost basic veterinary care for dogs and cats.

"The idea is not for them to get free veterinary care; it's to see what they can afford so that they're taking responsibility," said Chevalier, chief veterinary officer for the SPCA.

The man paid what he could, and the SPCA's Marie Gebura Caring Heart Fund helped out, too. And the man promised to pay more when he got back on his feet, she said.

"Now the pet stays in the home," she said. "They love this dog."

The SPCA sees someone surrendering a pet because of medical costs nearly every day, said SPCA President/CEO Gary Willoughby. The clinic is one way to help people retain their pets.

"Here we've already identified people who love their pets," he said.



Judith Lipsey with her dog Linus outside of the Lipsey Clinic at the SPCA Serving Erie County in West Seneca. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

The 6,500-square-foot [Stanford & Judith C. Lipsey Veterinary Clinic](#) opened several weeks ago at the SPCA's Harlem Road location in West Seneca. The Lipseys donated \$1.3 million to start the practice, but it was their dog Linus, an Australian labradoodle, who was the inspiration for it.

"We're just so happy we could do something for this population of animals. There is so much need in the world for something like this," Judith Lipsey said.

Talk to Lipsey today, and it's hard to believe she had been afraid of dogs since her brother was attacked by one when they were children. Her husband, Stan Lipsey, the longtime publisher of The Buffalo News who died in 2016, was the dog lover who had dogs when he was younger.

One day he said, "I'm 80 years old, I've always wanted a dog, I'm getting a dog," she recalled.

She wanted a dog that was friendly, and didn't shed. They got Linus 10 years ago, and she became a fast learner about dogs and their needs. When the SPCA asked the couple for a donation for its new building in West Seneca, she had the idea of sponsoring a low-cost vet clinic.

"I said, 'Let's do something different. Let's do something special,' " Lipsey said.

Once the donation was on board, architectural plans were changed to add a veterinary clinic on one end of the building. It took months to get the legalities straightened out so the clinic could operate in New York State.



Dr. Kelly Fox examines Sarah Warning's cat Hefty in the Lipsey Clinic. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

The clinic opened with little fanfare, so staff could get trained and used to the setup. It is open Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for appointments offering basic care, such as exams, nail trimming, flea preventatives and dental procedures. Surgeries, such as spaying and neutering, are done on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The clinic does not treat emergency or chronic health issues.

There are about 35 similar clinics across the country, Willoughby said.

A survey of its clients so far shows some have their own vets, but many do not, so doctors and technicians spend a lot of time educating owners on proper nutrition and dental care.

"Some of these folks maybe never had a doctor before," Willoughby said.

"We're very lucky, fortunate, Mrs. Lipsey enabled us to do this so we can provide a service, to reach that part of the population that's falling through the cracks," Chevalier said.

The Lipsey Clinic also allows the SPCA to have animals adopted more quickly into good homes, even if they need some follow-up care, like Hefty. Someone found the gray cat in a garbage dumpster. He had burns on his paws, legs and body, and he wound up at the SPCA.

Sarah Warning of Lockport saw a picture of the injured kitty online, and, she said, "I just had to have him."

She adopted him, and is taking him back for follow-up treatment for his wounds. Before the clinic opened, dogs and cats like Hefty who needed follow-up care or dental work would have been kept at the SPCA and would not have been able to go home with their families.

Part of the staff of the clinic will be veterinarian interns from Lincoln Memorial University of Tennessee through a program with Daemen College, Willoughby said.

"Once I got Linus, I got hooked on the experience of being an animal owner and this clinic seemed like the obvious thing," Lipsey said. "We were really happy we had the resources to do it."