

Veterinarian Knows PEF's Work First-Hand

Veterinarian Reed Stevens has served on numerous veterinarian-related boards, from the Niagara Frontier Veterinary Society and the Buffalo Academy of Veterinary Medicine to the Barkyard, Western New York's first dog park.

One of the most important, he said, is the Pet Emergency Fund.

"What the PEF does is allow pets to stay in the home, which is really the holy grail of reducing pet abandonment or euthanasia," said Stevens, whose three-year term on the Pet Emergency Fund board ended in 2020. "There are so many pet owners that are underserved and don't have the ability to provide even the most basic care. They face situations we call 'economic euthanasia.' That means the pet's medical issue is fixable, but the owner can't afford it – the cost is out of reach."

Stevens, a longtime Buffalo veterinarian, is only the fifth owner of the 141-year-old Ellicott Street Animal Hospital in downtown Buffalo. He is also co-owner with Dr. Susan Stickles of the West Side Pet Clinic, the city's first low-cost veterinary clinic. It opened in 2014 after Reed had an epiphany at church when a minister challenged congregants to do more to help others.

Veterinarians have always played a leading role with the Pet Emergency Fund. The non-profit was established in 1999 by the Niagara Frontier Veterinary Society to help people in financial need afford pet care in emergency and life-altering situations. A minimum of three veterinarians serve on its all-volunteer board, which includes other professionals and pet lovers.

The Pet Emergency Fund has helped veterinarians in Erie and Niagara counties provide care for about 8,000 pets and distributed nearly \$1 million entirely from charitable contributions. The fund pays a portion of a veterinary bill, which can make a difference when a pet owner is suddenly forced to confront the cost of medical treatment for a pet's illness or injury, Stevens said.

"We can help save these animals through the use of PEF funds, or even something as small as providing \$25 of medication that may be out of reach," Stevens said. "The PEF can make a difference that lasts for a lifetime for that person and maybe even for the pet. It doesn't have to be a big bill to make a difference in many pets' lives."

Reed said his practices have used the PEF on numerous occasions, allowing the pet owner to go home with the appropriate medical treatment and the animal on the mend.

One time "a few hundred dollars," Reed said, was used to help a male dalmation undergo life-saving surgery for bladder stones. Another time, \$238 was provided by the Pet Emergency Fund for an owner who couldn't afford it to help pay for an emergency ovariohysterectomy on a female brindle pit bull, which suffered from an infected uterus.

Stevens said \$100 in PEF funds was used to pay for the unblocking of a male neutered cat who came in unable to urinate. And \$500 provided by the PEF, he said, allowed for surgery on a gunshot wound to a pit bull.

Stevens said the organization's board members have a shared purpose to help those in need of emergency veterinary care.

"As far as I know, there is nothing like the PEF, which has dozens of participating hospitals," Stevens said. "At one level you would consider all of these veterinarians to be competitors, but here we are working together. One practice couldn't make a difference by itself, but by working together we can make a significant difference in Western New York."

