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219  
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I  
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219  
WEST

- [Front Page](#)
- [Bronx](#)
- [Brooklyn](#)
- [Manhattan](#)
- [Queens](#)
- [Staten Island](#)
- [Special Projects](#)
- [Audio](#)
- [News Map](#)
- [About](#)
- [Staff](#)
- [RSS Feeds](#)

## East New York



### [CD 5: Judo Offers Life Lessons](#)

Friday, June 5th, 2009

The Starrett Judo Club has earned more trophies than can fit in its display case.

The overflow of awards, some three feet high, cover a cafeteria-style table and some floor space throughout Starrett City's Office of Community Relations on Pennsylvania Avenue. The club, founded by former Haitian Olympian Parnel Legros, is a mirror of this integrated 153-acre community of just under 15,000.

"It's like Disneyworld," said Legros. "You name the country – Haiti, Russia, Poland – it's probably the most diverse community I've ever seen. I don't know anything else like it."

### **A Towering Neighborhood**

Starrett City offers a middle class, almost suburban lifestyle, to a diverse working-class community in East New York. Streets are called loops and the homogeneity of the 46, 15-story high-rise towers give no hint of the diversity that dwells there.

Starrett City was the first and remains the largest federally subsidized housing community in the country. When it was built in 1974, the owners set a policy to ensure a tenant ratio of 70 percent white to 30 percent black. They said the purpose was to prevent white flight, but the reality was that many black tenants were placed on an endless waiting list.

The policy was struck down in federal court in 1998.

Today, the growing Caribbean community in Starrett City reflects the surrounding neighborhood, where 33 percent of the population was foreign-born as of the 2000 census. Of that number, 41.4 percent were from the Caribbean – the second largest foreign-born population in the whole district, behind immigrants from Latin America.

### **Local Champs**

Legros said since the racial quotas were struck down, his club has become a United Nations of judo. Legros, 52, is the *sensei* (teacher) of the club and has taught physical education at Starrett City's Intermediate School 364 since 1989.

Legros, who immigrated from Haiti at 14, is a Judo world champion and was captain of the 1992 Haitian Olympic Team. He was training for Barcelona at Starrett City's school weight room when someone from management asked him to start an after-school judo program for local kids. Now, the club is known as a home to national and international champions.

### **World Travelers**

Harry St. Leger, 23, has lived in Starrett City his whole life. He and his twin brother, Garry, the sons of Haitian immigrants, started lessons at the Judo Club when they were 8. Their parents did not hesitate to support the two brothers and their sport, despite economic hardship.

Starrett City Public Affairs also helped out with college scholarships for both brothers. Harry St. Leger recently took a bronze medal at the nation championships in Massachusetts, despite an injured arm.

"Not a day goes by that I don't think about my club," said St. Leger. "It's different from other sports. You compete out of the state, out of the country."

“I’ve been all around the world.”



## **Mobile Clinics Help City’s Pet Cause**

Thursday, December 18th, 2008

On a recent chilly morning, about 25 people waited on line with their dogs and cats in front of one of the ASPCA’s mobile animal clinics. The truck was parked outside of the Animal Care and Control Center in East New York, where an on-site veterinarian was set to perform up to 100 spay/neuter surgeries in a day for free or minimal cost.

Little Bit, a miniature pincher, was shaking from the cold, so he hid inside the jacket of his best friend, David Fryar. Little Bit’s mom also recently had visited the mobile clinic, shortly after she gave birth to her litter. Now it was the baby’s turn.

“If you’re not going to mate them and find a good home for the puppies,” said Fryar, “you should take care of them.”

### **Ad Campaign Launched**

Fryar was talking not about throwing a dog a bone, but of spay/neuter surgery, which has been known to reduce the risk of reproductive cancers, lessen a pet’s aggression, and help control animal overpopulation. But spay/neuter programs are only effective, advocates say, if the public knows they are available.

The ASPCA launched an advertisement campaign in October that targets large breed dog owners, whose pets are most in need of the spaying/neutering, statistics show. The campaign featured graffiti-inspired artwork of a man with his dog and the slogan: “Show your boy you’ve got his back. Fix your dog, it’s all good!”

The spay/neuter advertisements were posted on billboards in the Bronx and Harlem, in newspapers, and there were companion radio spots in Spanish and English. Within 10 days of the campaign’s launch, the clinics saw a rise in the number of larger breed dogs at the clinic, officials said.

It’s estimated that 50,000 to 60,000 spay/neuter surgeries would need to be performed annually for programs such as the mobile clinic to have a major impact on animal overpopulation in New York City. The Center for Animal Care and Control currently takes in more than 27,000 stray cats and 12,000 dogs a year.

### **No-Kill Goal**

The ASPCA mobile clinics are one of the more than 140 efforts being funded by the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC Animals, a collective of animal rescue and adoption groups, working towards the goal of making New York a nycitynewsservice.com/.../east-new-york/

no-kill city by 2012.

Jane Hoffman, the president of the Mayor's Alliance, said Mayor Bloomberg was all for the venture, which was formed in 2002, just a few months after he took office.

In 2005, the Mayor's Alliance was awarded a \$23.5 million grant by Maddie's Fund, a nonprofit working city-by-city to turn the U.S. into a no-kill country. The funds are to be dispersed over seven years to local rescue, adoption, and spay/neuter groups.

"Because Bloomberg is an entrepreneur, he likes private-public solutions," said Hoffman. "This is private money to fund a [municipal] problem."

There is currently no mandatory spay/neuter law in New York City. In 2002, the city passed a law, which required that all animals in shelters be sterilized. But other pet sellers – like pet stores or private breeders – are exempt under state law.

While the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene recommends that owners spay or neuter their pets, not doing so comes with only a small penalty. The difference between licensing a neutered dog and unneutered dog is just three dollars – \$11.50 rather than \$8.50 a year. For pet owners unaware of free and low cost spay/neuter clinics, the surgery comes with a price tag. Depending on the animal, the breed, and the gender – and the veterinarian – a pet owner could expect to pay anywhere from \$50 to \$800.

### Getting Word Out

Emelinda Narvaez, who runs Earth Angels Canine Rescue and receives about 70 percent of her funding from the Mayor's Alliance, said offering free services is not enough. Narvaez has rescued more than 8,000 dogs, primarily pit bulls, and believes there needs to be more information on the importance of spay/neuter surgery – especially in Spanish.

"The signs need to say OPERE SO MASCOTA!" said Narvaez. "Operate or neuter your dog."

Hoffman also believes more public information would help with the no-kill goal. Not long ago, the city ran a subway campaign on dog-licensing – and licenses went up, Hoffman said. She would like to see the city team with the Alliance to produce a subway campaign, promoting free and low-cost spay/neuter services.

"The Alliance is ready," Hoffman said. "But we just don't have the money in our budget to run the subway ads."

## RELATED STORY: NEW ADS TARGET PIT BULLS

By JESSICA FIRGER

(As Seen in [City Limits](#))

When the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals launched an advertising campaign this fall to promote its mobile clinic for pet sterilization, the group tailored its message to the dog owners most in need of access to cheap or free pet services.

In addition to both Spanish and English newspaper and radio ads, the ASPCA sponsored wall-sized ads with [nycitynewsservice.com/.../east-new-york/](http://nycitynewsservice.com/.../east-new-york/)