



Rocky Mountain Vet

TV fame hasn't changed Dr. Jeff Young's core mission

BY LISA HORNUNG

Dr. Jeff Young has developed a fan following as the star of Animal Planet's *Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet*. The Denver-based, straight-talking, tattooed, flip-flop-wearing veterinarian is known for his mission of helping to control the pet population by spaying and neutering animals, often at little or no cost. And he fulfills his quest to help as many animals as he can by literally taking his show on the road.

ANIMAL PLANET/GETTY IMAGES



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HELPING UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

Young began his career in Grand Junction, Colo., at the Roice-Hurst Humane Society, where he and his staff return regularly to do spay and neuter outreach. For example, in January, his team, along with local volunteers, helped Roice-Hurst sterilize 132 animals free of charge, thanks to the fundraising efforts of several nonprofit groups.

It was just one of the many trips his team makes annually to care for needy animals.

Viewers of the *Dr. Jeff* show, which just finished filming its fifth season, have seen the crew travel to Native American reservations, Mexico and Romania to help control pet populations. The group operates on stray dogs, but also treats pets owned by people in these underserved areas where there are no veterinarians nearby or owners can't afford care.

"This is the stuff I was born to do; this is the stuff I love to do," Young says.

His motivation, he adds, is simply to help people and their pets live better lives.

"I'm a veterinarian, and I want to help more animals," he says. "And if I'm helping animals, I'm helping people, too. I don't want to be so cynical that I think if you can't afford (a procedure) then you shouldn't have the



LOW-COST CARE

Dr. Jeff Young's practice offers affordable dog spay services

\$200

Typical starting price at Denver-area practices

\$70

Typical starting price at Planned Pethood Plus

animal, and just send you out the door."

A VET IN THE MAKING

Young grew up in a military family that moved all over the world, but his roots lie in Indiana.

Both sets of his grandparents owned farms, one with soybeans, corn and pigs and the other a dairy farm. "I spent a lot of summers on those farms," he says. "That got me interested in animals. I also had a dog die when I was really young, and I felt helpless and couldn't do anything for it. So, from a long time ago, I just wanted to be a vet."

He graduated from Colorado State University's veterinary school in 1989, and then began working for Roice-Hurst. A year later, he opened Planned Pethood Plus in Wheat Ridge, Colo., with a primary focus on low-cost, high-volume spaying and neutering, but today it's a full-service vet clinic.

Planned Pethood strives to keep costs >



Young volunteers his time at several local organizations, including National Mill Dog Rescue in Peyton, Colo., where he and Susan Rieger, center, recently assisted the group's founder, Theresa Strader, with the care of Lilly, a 12-year-old terrier.





“If we educate people and we continue to do this, the animals will be healthier, and we’re going to give them better homes.”

— HECTOR MARTINEZ,
veterinary technician

low so that people of all income levels can afford its services. For example, it charges \$70 to \$90 to spay a dog, while the typical vet charge is around \$200 to \$300 at other Denver-area practices. Young will also often negotiate prices with pet owners so they can afford the services.

One of the ways Young’s practice funds this low-cost care is through donations to his foundation, Planned Pethood International. The group has also received grants to fund outreach trips within the U.S. and overseas, and a training center in Puerto Morelos, Mexico, where Young teaches veterinarians from all over the world. He doesn’t charge the vets for the training or lodging, but requires they perform community service as compensation.

The foundation also runs a rescue and adoption center, Planet Pet, in Denver.

“Our goal is to keep bringing in donations and grants so that we can keep doing this,” says Susan Rieger, the foundation’s adoptions and nonprofit manager. “(Young’s) been doing it for so long, he has no idea how much he’s given away. No idea. He doesn’t care. If he can make it work, he does it.” >

Young holds Samwise, an albino wallaby, after an exotic animal expert neutered the animal. Samwise’s surgery was featured in a February 2017 episode of *Dr. Jeff: Rocky Mountain Vet*.

THE VETS’ PETS



Veterinarians Jeff Young and Petra Mickova-Young have taken in several hard-luck pets over the years. An orange tabby cat was brought to their clinic last year with a severe leg injury. The owner opted to euthanize the cat rather than pay for surgery, so the Youngs decided to save the kitty and keep it as their pet.

“He’s a really cool cat,” Young says. Previously kept outdoors, “He thinks he’s in heaven now because he’s no longer outside.”

Their golden retriever, Fred, came to them last year under similar circumstances. A family brought him in because he had eaten something and needed to have the object surgically removed. “The owners wanted to put him to sleep, rather than taking a sock out of his belly,” says Young. He refused to euthanize Fred and asked the family to turn the dog over to him. They agreed, “And we got him healthy, and he’s been our dog ever since,” Young says.

— Lisa Hornung