

# The New York Times

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## In the Business of Feeling Good

By DEBORAH STRANGE

Mark Bustos is a stylist at Three Squares Studios, an upscale salon in New York where clients like Norah Jones and Marc Jacobs pay \$150 for a haircut. But on Sundays, Mr. Bustos takes to the streets and offers free haircuts to the homeless.

Cutting hair in the park, and imitating Robin Williams. (RAMSAY DE GIVE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

“Can you believe this is happening?” asked David Terry, who sat on a park bench beneath Mr. Bustos’s scissors recently. Even for those with nowhere special to go, it seems, there is something about looking your best.

“Whether I’m giving one at work or on the street, I think we can all relate to the haircut and how it makes us feel,” Mr. Bustos told The Times. “We all know what it feels like to get a good haircut.”

He got the idea when visiting family in the Philippines in 2012. Struck by the number of children he saw living in poverty, Mr. Bustos said, he rented a barbershop.

“It made me feel so good,” he said. “It was right to bring it home to New York.”

Others find their own ways of mixing business and charity. Ann Dunn, who once worked in public housing, said she became “obsessed” with finding unwanted cats a home. Her dream was to open a cat sanctuary with a cafe.

“If we said, ‘Come meet cats and adopt them,’ probably people wouldn’t come,” Ms. Dunn told The Times.

She and Adam Myatt, who produced calendars with photos of feral cats, raised \$40,000 to open Cat Town Cafe & Adoption Center in Oakland, California.

Cat cafes are well established in Japan, but few double as adoption centers. Cat Town claims to be the first permanent one of its kind in the United States. It sells coffee, handmade bagels and vegan treats. Customers visit cats in a separate area, where the felines lounge in beds shaped like cans of tuna instead of in cages more typical of a shelter.

“It takes them out of an ugly environment and puts them in an appealing situation where they can connect with lots of people who may adopt them,” Rich Avanzino of Maddie’s Fund, a rescue group that helped Cat Town Cafe, told The Times.

An hour of playtime with the cats costs \$10, and a cat’s adoption fee is \$50. Ms. Dunn and Mr. Myatt said the business has always been about saving cats instead of making money.

The comedian Margaret Cho said she learned about giving back to the community from a friend: Robin Williams.

Mr. Williams, who committed suicide in August, had raised millions for the homeless and was “the security blanket we all had,” Ms. Cho told The Times. When she was mourning his death, another friend told her, “Don’t mourn Robin — be Robin.”

Ms. Cho started performing at a youth shelter and where homeless people congregated. Donations — coats, shoes and blankets — were arranged on tables. At one donation table, Michael Austin, who had spent eight years on the streets, said he had been given free clothing before, but nothing so good.

“This is wonderful,” he said.

Most shows, Ms. Cho said, raised about \$2,000. She would break the money into single dollar bills and give them away.

“There is nothing better than making it rain dollar bills on a homeless man,” she said. “It’s a beautiful thing, and why not?”

Mr. Bustos, the stylist, said people often ask him how to join his team for good. “My answer is just go and do it,” he said.