



His surname may be Katz, but Ethan's heart has gone to the dogs—in this case his family's rescue pooches Fly (left) and Brooklyn.

Need a Boost?

T-shirt sales strengthen fundraising efforts

BY DANIELLE S. TEPPER

Eight-year-old Ethan Katz didn't start off wanting to rescue dogs for his ninth birthday—he wanted to *be* a dog. But when his parents declined his request for a \$700 mascot costume, he decided that saving canines was the next best thing.

The Stevensville, Md., native did his homework and found [Booster.com](#), a website that helps philanthropy-minded folks design and sell custom T-shirts to raise money for a cause or organization.

Ethan had no trouble choosing a charity. His family had recently adopted their youngest dog, Brooklyn, from [City Dogs Rescue](#) in Washington, D.C.

“He wanted to raise as much money as he could. He was obsessed; he checked it every day,” says his mother, Lisa Katz. “It was this cool little economics lesson we were having.”

Patrick Rafter, a communications specialist with [Booster](#), says that raising money for animals has become the third most popular category on the site.

“These campaigns can range from helping dogs and cats to hippos and

iguanas,” he says. “You become sort of a walking billboard for your favorite animal or shelter.”

Headquartered in Newton, Mass., [Booster.com](#) was launched in August 2013 by Virginia-based [CustomInk](#). In its first two years, [Booster](#) has disbursed more than \$20 million to worthy causes. Each campaign page shares a story about the cause; customers purchase shirts through the site and also have the option to make an additional monetary donation. “This turns someone who is passionate about a cause almost into a professional fundraiser, and the T-shirts become rallying tools,” says Rafter.

Meredith Raimondi, [City Dogs](#) director, worked closely with Ethan to come up with a simple and fresh image for the shirt. Rafter says [Booster](#) has a team on staff to help with slogans and design.

Word spread quickly between early April 2014 and Ethan's birthday a month later; he wound up raising \$2,640 for [City Dogs](#). After a local newspaper publicized

Ethan's efforts, he came to the attention of “[Good Morning America](#).” Ethan and his mom—in what she refers to as “a completely serendipitous situation”—soon got a call to be in New York City at 5 a.m. the next day to appear on the show.

“The national media just kind of took it and ran with it,” says Katz.

Now 10, Ethan has run three more campaigns for a total donation of almost \$16,000 to [City Dogs](#), an all-volunteer nonprofit that takes dogs from overcrowded shelters and places them in foster homes.

“Ethan was the first kid to do anything even approaching this scale,” says Amy McLean, executive director of [City Dogs](#). “We get kids doing lemonade stands or Girl Scout fundraisers for merit badges, but it was so refreshing to see this young person get so involved—and to be so successful! We were just blown away.”

Rafter calls [Booster](#) “a socially conscious business” that keeps a percentage of the proceeds, but the more you raise, the more you keep.

Rebecca Mountain of Massachusetts, owner of [Mountain Pet Products](#), has sold more than 500 T-shirts through [Booster](#) to raise nearly \$6,000 for the [Cat House](#) on the Kings, a cat sanctuary and adoption center in California.

The numbers surprised her, but she attributed the success to [Cat House's](#) impressive Facebook following (over 661,000 fans) and her shirt's funny slogan, which reads, “If you're uncomfortable around my CAT I'm happy to lock you in the other room when you come over.”

[Blind Cat Rescue](#) in North Carolina has launched four different [Boosters](#) since the summer of 2014, each aiming to help fund 1,500 spay/neuter surgeries. As of July 2015, more than 1,000 shirts and approximately \$153,000 had gone toward achieving more than half of that goal, says founder Alana Miller.

“This is truly a tool that will work for anyone,” Rafter says. “You can't afford a billboard, but you can sell a shirt.” ■