

'Temporary' Tahoe Humane Society exec retires

By Kathryn Reed

Dawn Armstrong never intended to run a Humane Society, let alone for more than two decades.

The 70-year-old came to South Lake Tahoe not sure of what she wanted to do. Right away she met people associated with the Lake Tahoe Humane Society. She joined the board mostly as a way to help animals and meet people. At the time the board had been looking for an executive director. After about six months and still no leader, Armstrong said she would be willing to take the job for six months.

Armstrong retired Dec. 31 after 22 years as executive director of the humane society.

"I think I'm going to like retirement. My head is spinning and I feel off balance," Armstrong told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Dawn Armstrong with Lexie, Noodles and Goldie.

Photo/Provided

Now she has time to pursue her writing (she has a book she wants to finish), enjoy Tahoe, be more physical and spend more time with her animals instead of worrying so much about all

the animals.

The phrase "Keep Tahoe Kind" was created on her watch. After all, it was a corporate marketing background that she brought to the job.

"I thought that's what we were supposed to do," Armstrong said in reference to the Keep Tahoe Kind phrase. She said at the time the Humane Society was the only group to ask the League to Save Lake Tahoe for permission to alter its Keep Tahoe Blue slogan. The former League director said go for it. Armstrong envisioned people having both bumper stickers on their vehicles.

The slogan is about people being kind to each other and animals.

The local chapter was founded in 1967. It originated on the Nevada side before moving to California. At times its offices were in Meyers, while now they are in South Lake Tahoe.

In 1987 the shelter burned to the ground. Many animals died and the insurance company didn't cover the costs to completely rebuild so a fund-raising drive helped with the rebuilding.

Today the Humane Society is largely about educating people and cruelty prevention. Children's programs include the My Reading Buddy program. The society also works with many of the social service groups in town.

Besides the executive director, who is now Niki Congero, there is one other full-time employee. There is a board that oversees everything.

When Armstrong first came on board she was thrown into a controversy with South Lake Tahoe and El Dorado County.

"In 1992 we gave up the city and county animal control contract and moved out of the shelter building," Armstrong said. "We decided after looking at our finances that we would

go broke if we kept doing animal control.”

Money was raised for a shelter in what is now Angie’s Signs in Meyers. This meant there were two shelters on the South Shore. It eventually closed in winter 2002. The population was starting to diminish and change to the point where two shelters were not needed.

The society then began focusing more on education.

“What kept me with it, because it’s hard, was the education aspect of it,” Armstrong said of the job. “The wonderful part is the kids. You hope when they grow up they have a new outlet and appreciation for all creatures.”

And while there were times when funding was such an issue that Armstrong had to have other jobs, the Humane Society remained a passion.

Now Armstrong is pursuing personal passions.