

SPCA fires director once again

Animal Shelter
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SANTA CRUZ — Battle-scarred SPCA executive director Jody Cramer has been fired again.

Cramer (formerly Paterniti) was let go, effective Friday.

A short statement from SPCA Board president Joan DeNeffe said the board "has elected not to renew the employment contract of its executive director, Jody Cramer (Paterniti)."

"I don't know why," Cramer said. "I didn't do anything wrong. That's why it's so startling."

"I felt there was some tension, but I had no idea it was of this magnitude," she added.

The departure is Cramer's second. In March 1995 she was forced out by a board of directors polarized over her management style and emphasis on animal rights.

Cramer's staff closed ranks in support of her. In a series of well-orchestrated maneuvers, Cramer managed to gain control of the board of directors — and regain her \$52,000 a year job.

The board members who opposed her were voted off the board, and Cramer supporters were voted in.

Among Cramer's supporters who joined the board during the earlier coup was DeNeffe, now board president.

DeNeffe said Friday that she and the other board members were unanimous in their decision to seek new leadership.

"Jody has done a really excellent job, but it was time to just get a little new leadership," DeNeffe said. "It has nothing to do with the performance Jody has given us. It's just time for a change."

During the earlier turmoil, Cramer's supporters liked the SPCA's advocacy work and its animal rights stances. Her critics were more interested in animal control and animal welfare.

Cramer said at the time that she suspected disgruntled board members didn't like her management style, which emphasizes self-



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

Jody Cramer at the SPCA in 1991, the year she took over.

directed work teams and empowering employees.

This time there was no ongoing debate on philosophical differences.

DeNeffe said directors were satisfied with the SPCA's finances, philosophy and management. "We're not changing the direction of the organization in any way," she said.

Cramer said that her first hint of trouble came in a letter DeNeffe delivered Feb. 2. The letter said the board felt it needed a period of time to "resolve issues around your ability to work effectively with the board" and to show the leadership necessary to lead the organization, Cramer said.

Cramer said she was offered a three-month extension of her contract. She rejected that offer because it allowed her to be dismissed without cause, she said.

On Wednesday, Cramer said DeNeffe told her that since she didn't sign the extension agreement, she was being dismissed.

"The board never talked to me about what these issues are. It feels like there was a sentence and I was executed, but there wasn't a trial," Cramer said.

SPCA spokeswoman Karla Koebnick said the dismissal also

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came as a surprise to employees.

"There was no expectation that this would happen, no warning that this would happen," Koebnick said. "I can tell you that it's really a surprise to the staff and we're sad about it."

"We miss her. She's going to be a hard act to follow."

Cramer took over in 1991 after serving on the board for two years. She had no formal training for the job but had worked in business administration for Silicon Systems.

She came to the SPCA with an agenda to adopt a mandatory sterilization ordinance for dogs and cats over six months of age, with an exception for breeders of purebred animals.

She was successful: The breeding ban was adopted in 1994. Dur-

ing that time, the number of cats and dogs killed at the shelter was cut almost in half, from 4,767 in 1992 to 2,206 in 1997, according to the SPCA statement.

Recent gains were much smaller. In 1996, 571 dogs were euthanized compared to 565 in 1997, Cramer said in a report to the county Board of Supervisors last week.

The number of cats killed went from 1,803 in 1996 to 1,641 in 1997.

The SPCA statement announcing her departure listed the breeding ban ordinance as one of her outstanding accomplishments and said that it serves as a model nationwide.

But the breeding ban also had opponents. Naomi Kirschenbaum, an Aptos veterinarian, opposed the ordinance and was critical of Cramer's handling of it.

Kirschenbaum said at the time that Cramer had an agenda and really wasn't interested in anyone else's input if it didn't fit with what she wanted to do.

The city of Santa Cruz had also been unhappy with the SPCA. City officials had considered having their own stray animal pickup service and just using the SPCA as a shelter.

But recent contract negotiations with the city had been going well, Cramer said.

Kat Brown, operations manager, will serve as the interim leader of the SPCA while the board begins the search for a new executive, said Koebnick.

Cramer said she's not sure what she will do. "I do believe that when one door closes, something else will open," she said.