



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

New county Animal Services General Manager Henry Brzezinski gives a bit of TLC to a rescued dog at the agency's Scotts Valley kennel on Wednesday.

County Animal Services gets a new manager

Animal Shelter

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cia Geisreiter.

Lucky for him, Henry Brzezinski can bring his two dogs, Cody and Danny, to work every day, and they can continue to loaf around his office much as they did in Placerville, their previous home.

Cody and Danny may already have adjusted, but Brzezinski is still settling into his new position as general manager of Santa Cruz County Animal Services, which he started on July 1.

Brzezinski arrived in Santa Cruz from El Dorado County, where he was chief of animal services for more than five years. He also worked in Santa Cruz as executive director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals during a seven-month period in 2001.

He takes the helm at a moment of recovery for Animal Services, which has faced an onslaught of animal evacuations brought on by three major wildfires in the county in less than two months.

During the Trabing Fire in June, Animal Services' 30 employees had to run four shelters in the county and rescue hundreds of animals, according to Coordinator Tri-

It was an intense experience in a short amount of time, Brzezinski said.

"We gave up vacation time, we gave up days off. We worked early in the morning to late in the evening. We did a lot of good, but at the same time, it was really heartbreaking to see the animals that didn't make it out," Geisreiter said.

Brzezinski is no stranger to dealing with animal rescue during emergencies. He led El Dorado Animal Services in its rescue of more than 100 animals during the Angora Fire in South Lake Tahoe in 2007.

"If anything, right now, the pressing issue is that the staff was overwhelmed and devastated by the sad things that occurred. We always have to take care of the animals, but we have to take care of the staff too," Brzezinski said.

The heavy workload and emotional strain has caused many Animal Services employees to suffer from compassion fatigue, said Geisreiter. Compassion fatigue is a term used to identify a gradually lessening degree of compassion due to trauma or work directly with trauma victims. In order to help employees cope, Brzezinski has invited a nationally renowned animal welfare con-

sultant to hold a workshop later this month.

Despite the difficulties faced by Animal Services workers in Santa Cruz this summer, Brzezinski is convinced it's a great place to work with animals.

"There's a lot of progress that's been made. ... It's an animal welfare-oriented community," he said.

A 25-year veteran of work in animal services in South Carolina and California, Brzezinski is already well-connected in Santa Cruz and nationwide. In his capacity as a member of the Board of the California Animal Control Directors Association, a position he still holds, he worked with Lisa Carter of the Santa Cruz SPCA on the mandatory spay and neuter bill submitted to the state Legislature in 2007 and amended in June 2008.

"I have great hopes for him. His heart is definitely in the right place," Carter said.

He racked up experience working on the completion of a new shelter in South Lake Tahoe and the beginning of a new one in Placerville, which will serve him well in the next two months as Animal Services moves its Scotts Valley shelter to a new \$5.8 million facility on Seventh Avenue in Live Oak in September.