

Head of Animal Services leaves post

Brzezinski moving back to El Dorado County

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Animal Shelter 32610

SANTA CRUZ — Deja vu might best describe Henry Brzezinski's career in protecting animals.

• Brzezinski, head of the county's Animal Services Authority, is moving back to El Dorado County to take the same position he held there for nearly six years before landing the Santa Cruz job in June 2008.



BRZEZINSKI

Before working in El Dorado County, Brzezinski ran the Santa Cruz SPCA briefly in 2001.

Brzezinski, who earned about \$120,000 a year, will step down as general manager of Santa Cruz County Animal Services Authority on April 2 to resume the work of chief of Animal Services in El Dorado County.

"It was a hard decision, first of all," said Brzezinski, 52. "I have my loyalties to the animals here, the staff and my board. But I also have a familiarization and loyalty with El Dorado County."

Brzezinski said he was heavily recruited by the director of Health Services in El Dorado County to take over the two shelters there, located in Placerville and South Lake Tahoe.

Brzezinski was hired at Animal Services after his predecessor, Katherine Vos, abruptly left the job after nine months.

He took the helm at a time of recovery for Animal Services, which faced an onslaught of animal evacuations brought on by three major wildfires in the county in less than two months. The heavily emotional work of rescuing hundreds of animals, working around the clock and seeing some animals not make it took its toll on the shelter's staff and many of them suffered "compassion fatigue."

Brzezinski's tenure in Santa Cruz County, though short, was marked by the infamous animal neglect case of Boulder Creek resident Robert Brunette, who was arrested in July 2008 for having more than 50 abused and neglected dogs on his property, and the shelter's move in September 2008 from Scotts Valley to a new \$6 million facility on Seventh Avenue in Live Oak.

Brzezinski boasts of boosting the shelter's volunteer base to more than 500, a "pretty monumental" task, he said, because of the numerous Los Gatos volunteers who quit when the Scotts Valley facility closed.

Lisa Carter, director of the

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Santa Cruz SPCA, worked closely with Brzezinski as both agencies overlapped the charge of finding homes for animals.

In addition, the two collaborated on the mandatory spay and neuter bill submitted to the state Legislature in 2007 and amended in June 2008.

Carter said Brzezinski's departure comes as "a difficult blow."

"Not only did he care about the animals passionately, he cared about

the people," Carter said. "I could always pick up the phone and get a straight answer, a good opinion."

Santa Cruz Police Chief Howard Skerry, a member of the board that hired Brzezinski, said he's sorry to see him go.

"He was always very professional and good to work with," Skerry said.

The county took over animal control services and the bulk of sheltering in 2002. The SPCA now serves as an advocacy and education group but does not handle shelters.

The Animal Services Authority, with shelters in Live Oak

and Watsonville, is governed by a board of city and county administrators and law enforcement heads. County spokeswoman Dinah Phillips said the Animal Services Authority board will soon name an interim general manager while a search for Brzezinski's replacement is under way.

"He's going to be really hard to replace," Phillips said. "He's a real professional. He brought a lot of knowledge and experience to this position."

Brzezinski said El Dorado County will be his last career stop, and plans to retire there.