

GIMME SHELTER

Ken White may be the president of the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA and an enthusiastic pet lover, but there's one aspect of animal care in which he fails miserably. "I'm a terrible foster parent," he admits. "I never bring them back to the shelter!"

What White lacks in short-term parenting skills, he makes up for as a loving dad to two dogs (Archie and Frida), three cats (Isabelle, Puccini, and Stinky Louise), and a bearded dragon named Didgeridoo—all rescue animals, naturally—who share his San Mateo home. In fact, Archie, a 90-pound sheep dog mix, was the first dog to graduate from PHS/SPCA's Animal Behavior program. "He had clearly been abused, and was fearful and therefore aggressive," White recalls. "We took him home to sort of finish the work the behaviorists started, and he's now the kind of guy who sleeps on the couch with the cats around or on top of him."

White joined PHS/SPCA in 2002 after working for animal protection organizations around the country since the late '70s. It's not the most likely path for a man whose only pet growing up was a goldfish. "My mother thought animals were a source of dirt," he recalls of his Brooklyn childhood. "I clamored for pets as a kid, and the first thing I did once I was out on my own was get a dog. Since then, I've never lived without many animals of different species."

At work, White is surrounded by an even more eclectic menagerie. This past year, PHS/SPCA received about 6,000 dogs and cats, as well as rabbits, birds, reptiles, and other unwanted domestic animals. Fortunately for those animals, they arrived at a beautiful and state-of-the-art temporary home: the Tom & Annette Lantos Center for Compassion in Burlingame, which opened in 2011. "The best thing I can say about it is it's working," says White of the center, which has drawn increasing numbers of visitors to the shelter and allowed for the expansion of vital programs. "It's amazing how many iPhones you see snapping pictures of the facility."

Under White's leadership, the PHS/SPCA has served as a model to shelters around the world, but he is quick to share credit with his staff, the nonprofit's hundreds of volunteers, and the Bay Area as a whole. "Shelters reflect the personalities of their surrounding communities," he says, "and we owe our success to that." ♦ —ROBIN HINDERY



Ken White with tabby Janis and Rottweiler Francis, two Peninsula Humane Society pets in search of loving homes.

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