

Bozeman's animal shelter gets new director

By NIK GROSFIELD For the Chronicle

Traci Weller has always loved animals.

"I was the kid who found a kitten or a dog and brought it home," Weller said recently, sitting in her homey office at Heart of Valley Animal Shelter, where she took over as executive director this past summer.

Weller had volunteered at the shelter for three years, including time on the board of directors, but the job allows her to meld her "passion with gainful employment," she said.

So, it isn't a surprise what Weller's favorite part of the job is: "The animals," she said, choking up.

Weller, 40, has about 17 years of experience in nonprofit management, with an emphasis in fundraising. Her most recent post was with the Montana State University Foundation. She was chosen from among 50 people who applied to replace Margie Taylor, who announced her retirement in June.

The shelter, on Cameron Bridge Road, is housed in a nearly 20,000-square-foot building that opened two years ago. Taylor led the campaign to raise \$4 million for the new shelter and began working on an endowment fund.

Weller's primary goal as director, she said, will be to build that endowment to the point where it will be protected against economic downturns, which tend to choke the flow of donations.

Donations make up 65 percent of the shelter's revenue.

Public money from cities and the county make up about 6 to 8 percent of annual revenue, according to the shelter's Web site.

Weller also hopes to build educational programs, including information on neutering and spaying pets, and establishing a kind of helpline for people to call regarding pet troubles, she said.

"Surrendering should be a last resort," she said. "A trained owner and pet is a happy owner and pet."

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