



## Community

# Animal Control Officer Takes Final Bow-Wow

By CAROL REIF

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SOMERS, N.Y. - When it came to animal control officers, Helga Stanton was truly a leader of the pack.

The stylish Lake Lincolndale woman, who stands 5 feet 4 inches without her famous 4-inch heels on, had fearlessly faced down more than one or two large and cranky canines in her time.

But it was her reputation for discipline, order and, more importantly, kindness that folks say they will miss most now that she's retired.

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Stanton was definitely no Cruella de Vil when it came to dealing with errant pets and their humans, recalls eldest daughter Corinne, who works at Halston Media, the owner of The Somers Record.

"People always tell me, 'Your mom's so nice; she always gave me a heads-up,' " she said.

Helga Stanton hung up her metaphorical net and leashes last month after a quarter-century in the town post. In keeping with the family motto "Togetherness," her son Robert, a New York state trooper for 24 years, also retired in December.

Both Robert and his brother, Rick, went into law enforcement because of their late dad, a beloved Somers police officer for 30 years. Rick is employed by the MTA police.

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It was Robert Sr. who convinced his wife to take the job, telling her she'd be really good at it.

And he wasn't wrong.

Anyone who can handle a bustling houseful of kids (four of her own, two foster children) not to mention a German shepherd, two springer spaniels, a Yorkie, and a rescue poodle—AND run a business (the Stanton's had a stationery store in Lake Lincolndale for many years)—should have no problem corralling a pooch on the loose or muffling one whose incessant barking is driving neighbors up the wall.

Among her other duties were reuniting lost dogs with their owners and helping to find new families for the homeless ones.

Social media had made doing that part of the job a lot easier lately, Stanton said.

She also handed out appearance tickets to folks who didn't renew their pet's license and monitored cases where another animal or a person may have been bitten. In the latter case, she notified the health authorities; in the former, just the owners.

Then there was, she admits, the occasional scary situation where the "suspect" was baring his teeth, growling and generally refusing to be a good boy.

One of the hairiest was when a pit bull chomped down on its owner's guest. The poor soul needed dozens of stitches in his face and the offending pup had to sit in quarantine until the judge decided its fate. Stanton was called to testify.

In the end, the owner agreed to muzzle it and keep it in a pen.

Then there was the time when a very unhappy 125-pound Rottweiller "declined" to get out of her van when she tried to drop it off at a kennel late at night.

After "praying a lot," the petite Stanton was able to budge the beast without getting bitten.

Dog control officers are armed with tranquilizer guns, but fortunately, Stanton never had to deploy hers.

Stanton was never seriously injured on the job, but she attributes that to pure serendipity.

Now that she's a slightly less nimble adult,, maybe the lucky streak is nearing an end?

"It's time to move on," Stanton conceded.

Besides that, having rescued every wild critter from swans and squirrels to deer and raccoons, Mother Nature's more than ready to make some space for herself, maybe even travel.

It's something her now-grown children and late hubby had always urged her to do: Relax and enjoy life.

Helga and Robert Stanton met in Mount Vernon in the early 1970s. She was driving a little green sports car and he was a 6-foot-3 traffic cop. He pulled her over and, smitten, boldly asked her out on a date.

The couple married and lived for a while with his parents in the Bronx before moving to Somers in the late 1960s. After retiring as a detective in 1984, he worked as a security guard before joining the Somers police in 1989.

Robert Stanton worked right up to the time he passed away, in 2019, shortly after his 78th birthday and their 50th wedding anniversary.

The pair were so close that they met up almost every day—she in her animal control van and he in his police car—at a picnic table at a friend's business to share lunch and chat.

They seemed way too lovey-dovey for an old married couple (now with eight grandchildren), so some of the employees there mistakenly assumed they were having an illicit romance, joked Robert Jr.

## FOND FAREWELLS

Among the folks who regret that Helga Stanton's moving on is one of her predecessors, Michael Amato, owner of Amato Farms in Somers and a volunteer firefighter.

Speaking of the whole Stanton clan, he said recently: "They're nice people."

When Amato held the post, "it wasn't that big of a deal," he said.

But once Helga Stanton took it on, she used her organizational skills to streamline and simplify the piles of paperwork. Her connection to, and understanding of, local government and law enforcement also helped.

She took things "to the next level," Amato said, adding that always smiling Stanton was "very kind" and willing to cut folks a break when necessary.

People will usually do the right thing if you treat them with compassion and understanding, said Stanton, who tried to put herself "in their shoes."

Robert said his mom "always looks for the best in people," adding, "She'll give them chance after chance until they prove her wrong."

Police Chief Mike Driscoll also praised Stanton for going above and beyond. Stanton always responded promptly to every complaint from the public, even on her days off.

"I can't say enough for her work ethic," he said. "She's unbelievable."

Having such an efficient animal control officer had helped the part-time police force "do its job," Driscoll said. "the town will miss her greatly."

Town Clerk Patty Kalba, from whose office Stanton worked, was also sad to see her go.

"Her hard work and dedication to the town was always amazing," Kalba said. "I will miss her immensely."