

Sunny Hills Services of San Anselmo finds new boss within own ranks

By Brent Ainsworth

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Mary Denton, who for the past two years has helped orchestrate the expansion of Sunny Hills Services as chief financial officer, has been named chief executive of the San Anselmo-based nonprofit that serves vulnerable youth and their families.

Denton replaces Joe Costa, who left in December to take a position in Southern California.

"I'm very honored to have been selected," said Denton, a Larkspur resident.

Denton worked 19 years for Bank of America in international lending and investment management. She was hired in 2000 at Sunny Hills, left for three years to work as a financial consultant to nonprofits, then returned in 2008.

Sunny Hills board president Lydia Cameron said Denton was chosen because of her knowledge in nonprofit management and leadership, finance and operations and child welfare-related policies.

"Mary has acquired the experience and built the relationships that are critical to the continued success of the agency," Cameron said.

In the wake of the economic downturn, Sunny Hills anticipated a decline in private giving and drew up a conservative budget, Denton said. "Knock on wood, I am reasonably optimistic about the coming year,"

she said. "We rely a lot on government funding and we're finding that counties are pinched and have to cut back. It's definitely hitting us."

Sunny Hills serves about 700 children annually and has expanded into Sonoma and Alameda counties, shifting away from serving as a residential facility for kids in need. In the early 2000s, Sunny Hills housed 89 children, including 40 at the San Anselmo facility and the rest in group homes. The nonprofit no longer has a residential program in Marin.

"Part of our strategic plan was to broaden our reach even though our heart is in Marin County," Denton said. "As we have evolved, we've done what is consistent with child welfare in the state and the country in that we're focusing more on the overall environment such as school settings and family settings. We're looking at serving clients in a range of different settings, not just residential."

Denton was a Phi Beta Kappa at the University of California at Riverside and obtained a master's degree at the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley. She also is member of the board of directors of the Marin Humane Society.

Sunny Hills, which opened in 1895 as a Presbyterian orphanage, has 102 employees in three Bay Area counties.

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