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## Lawyer combines passions at new job

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L. Kristen Strawbridge said her search for the perfect job finally came to an end this year after taking several different career paths.

Strawbridge became Illinois director of the Humane Society of the United States in August, a position that she said allows her to combine her passions for law, animals and politics.

Strawbridge didn't always know what she wanted to do. Her journey to finding her dream job began as a child growing up in Mississippi.

Born to a pair of teachers, Strawbridge, 33, grew up as an only child. She did, however, have quite a few four-legged friends.

"Cats, dogs, sheep and horses," she said with a laugh, describing her array of childhood pets. "Several sheep."

Not only did she find a fondness for animals, but Strawbridge said Mississippi also fostered her interests in the law and politics.

Her grandfather, Jack E. Harper Jr., served as the chancery clerk for Sunflower County, Miss., for about 40 years before he retired.

She said she became fascinated with the political and legal professions after hearing her grandfather's stories and watching him get elected.

Despite her initial interests in the fields her grandfather worked in, she took a few detours before turning down the road to law school.

After graduating from Indiana University in 2000 with a degree in sports communications, Strawbridge took a job as a Chicago Bulls Luvabull dancer.

She stayed in Chicago for about a year before moving to Los Angeles to pursue an acting career.

In the year and a half she spent in California, Strawbridge said she did "a bunch of commercials, but nothing too exciting."

She said she then returned to the Midwest to focus her career efforts on broadcasting.

Strawbridge served as a weekend anchor for WSBT-TV Channel 22 in South Bend, Ind. She also briefly worked in sales for the Indiana Pacers.



L. Kristen Strawbridge

These jobs, she said, helped her prepare and save money to attend The John Marshall Law School.

During law school, Strawbridge managed to find time to pursue her passion for animals and politics.

She interned for U.S. Sen. Richard J. Durbin's Chicago media office and became involved in John Marshall's Animal Law Society, a student group dedicated to increasing awareness of how the law can be used to protect animals.

After graduating in 2008, Strawbridge became a staff attorney for the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR).

Not long after joining the state agency, Strawbridge found herself in the middle of controversy. The IDFPR needed to resolve the Burr Oak Cemetery scandal in 2009 by reforming industry regulations. The scandal involved fraud on the part of the cemetery's officials.

"I had my eyes open," she said of the experience.

She stayed in that position until August, when she became head of the Humane Society's animal welfare efforts throughout Illinois.

"I love it," she said. "It lets me do every-

thing I love."

In her new role, Strawbridge serves as the voice for the national group in Illinois. She works on her own from her Lakeview home.

She assists law enforcement agencies and shelters in emergency animal rescues and disaster preparedness. She said she looks forward to building support for the Humane Society in the Illinois General Assembly.

Strawbridge plans to work with lawmakers to ensure animals get protected under the state's laws. She also wants to work with the various bar associations' animal law groups.

Rep. Sara Feigenholtz, D-Chicago, said she looks forward to working with Strawbridge on animal-related legislation. She pushed for several pet friendly bills in the past few years.

Feigenholtz said knows of Strawbridge's work at the IDFPR, as well the time she spent as an unofficial adviser to Gov. Patrick J. Quinn's office on animal issues.

Strawbridge also happens to be one of her constituents.

"I think she has the temperament and personality to have a good career in lobbying," she said. "She has a very special style. She's likeable and passionate."

Lindsay K. Hansen Anderson, director of legislative affairs for the governor, agreed.

Anderson said Strawbridge was brought in to help the governor's staff a few years ago, when some controversies occurred over puppy mills and pet store regulations.

"We pulled Kristen in because she had a lot of knowledge of the issues and was someone who was able to work with all sides," she said. "She came in with an approach and as a problem-solver and was able to find the right balance and listen to both sides, which is impressive."

Anderson said with the governor being such a big fan of pets, she expects to work with Strawbridge in the upcoming legislative session.

In addition to knowing her professionally, Anderson said she knows Strawbridge on a personal level as well.

Strawbridge's boyfriend, John S. Kamis, works with Anderson at the governor's office.