Officially, Jerilee Zezula retired from UNH this past May after 30 years of championing the cause of pets and small animals, from teaching animal care to building a state-of-the-art biology lab to pairing the elderly with companion animals.

But the truth is “retirement” doesn’t mean a whole lot when your profession is your lifelong passion.

“I know I’m not really retired,” Zezula says. “I’m just going in a different direction.”

Future generations of UNH students—and anyone who cares about animal welfare—can be thankful for that.

“When students, especially graduates, talk about her, they’re in awe,” says Laurie Chapman-Bosco, associate professor and chair of applied animal science. “Her creativity, knowledge, credibility, and passion for her work are just amazing.”

So, expect to see Zezula remain active in ElderPet, a program she and her students started at UNH that brings Pet Partner teams to extended care centers, libraries, and public schools, and offers pet-related support, assistance, and counseling to people of all ages and abilities. She hopes to boost its fundraising, recruit volunteers, bolster its board of directors, and help start ElderPet programs in other regions.

She’ll continue working with the New England Animal Control/Humane Academy, a summer program she started at UNH to educate animal control officers. And she still serves on the Governor’s Task Force for the Humane Treatment of Animals.

Finally, she’s taking courses on animal forensics, which may help her solve some of the state’s most vexing animal-related crimes and mysteries.

In other words, Zezula will be practicing what she’s preached to her students for decades: That the learning process never stops. And being able to study something you’re passionate about is a gift to be cherished.

“My goal is to get them to make their experience here just the beginning of their education, and to see that learning is a lifelong experience,” Zezula says.

It’s no surprise that when Zezula is at home, she and her husband, Alan, a retired veterinarian, enjoy spending time with Abby, an aged German shepherd and retired Pet Partner, and Broo, a black cat.

“When students, especially graduates, talk about her, they’re in awe.”

—Laurie Chapman-Bosco