agent PAWS had been working

Pat said she found the place. "And

looking too good. "When the name San Andreas and the

word "rumble" come together, those unfamiliar with California

geography immediately think about earthquakes. Residents of the

Calaveras County seat often declare with much intended

humor, "It’s not our fault." But rumbling can in fact be heard in

this town of almost 2,500 resi-
dents, though it’s not a rumble

many people in the Gold Country

have ever heard. These rumbles

come from Asian and African e-

lephants, residents of a jumbo-sized

retirement community designed

specifically for their well-being.

ARK 2000, the 2,300-acre sanc-
tuary operated by the Performing

Animal Welfare Society, came to

the Gold Country almost by ac-
dent. Co-executive directors Pat

Derby and Ed Stewart had been on

the lookout for wide-open spaces

for some time, and as the new mil-

leum approached, things weren’t

looking too good.

"I’d been in Mexico for 10
days," Stewart told a recent group

of visitors to San Andreas, "and

Pat said she found the place." Derby

then explained that she received a call from a real estate

agent PAWS had been working

with who had located a sizeable

chunk of property in the Mother

Lode. As Stewart tells the story,
his and Derby’s first venture to the

land that would soon become home to pachyderms and more

exotic animals proved life altering.

"Pat said, ‘There it is,’” Stewart

said Derby indicated with a dra-
matic sweep of her arms overlook-

ing the Calaveras River as it flows

through a portion of the property.

"‘Where is it?’ I asked her. ‘Where

are the lines?’"

Stewart jokes that he was partly

filled with dread because he

knew a herculean task lay ahead. Millions of dollars

would need to be raised before any of their four-legged charges

saw their new homes.

Caring for critters

Derby and Stewart founded

PAWS in 1984 and its mission

statement tells it all: "PAWS is
dedicated to the protection of

performing animals, to providing

sanctuary to abused, abandoned

and retired captive wildlife, to

enforcing the best standards of

care for all captive wildlife, to

the preservation of wild species

and their habitat and to promot-
ing public education about cap-
tive wildlife issues."

Some might read that statement

and assume Derby and Stewart

are anxious to declare animals

more important than people or are
determined to degrade any kind of

human interference in animals’
lives, but that’s not quite the case.

They are renowned for their

knowledgeable handling of wild

and exotic creatures that have been

used and abused in circuses, at

zoos and in private collections

around the world. They also would

rather see animals in the wild, not

confined in cages or pens too

small for their needs.

Derby saw the plight of perform-
ing animals firsthand early in her

Hollywood career. She trained ani-
mals for movies and television

shows. She worked on “Flipper,”

“Lassie” and “Gentle Ben,” to

call a few. She also trained the

famed Lincoln Mercury cougars

for commercials. She chronicled

many of her experiences in the

book, “The Lady and Her Tiger,”
published in 1976 with writer

Peter S. Beagle.

On a 30-acre patch outside Galt,

PAWS began providing home to

some of those battered and

bruised animals. Elephants might

have required the most space, but

lions, tigers, several species of

bear, monkeys and even a black

leopard came to call PAWS

home. As more and more ani-
mals required their hospitality,

Derby and Stewart knew they

needed to grow.

Amanda Blake – who Derby

met in 1967 on the set of the tel-

evision series “Gunsmoke,” on

which Blake played Miss Kitty

applauded Stewart’s and Derby’s

efforts and provided financial and

administrative assistance when

PAWS was founded in the 1980s.

At pawsweb.org, Derby notes

that Blake lived at the Galt sanc-
tuary during her final years to be

closer to the animals she loved.

Upon her death in 1989, Blake’s

estate made a large contribution

to PAWS and, by 1997, the

Amanda Blake Memorial Wild-

life Refuge was established near

the old Rancho Seco nuclear

power plant in Herald. Today the

property is home to fallow deer,

elk, Muntjac deer, rhea, ostrich,

emu and a herd of scimi-
tar-horned oryx. That herd is one

of the only in the country in

which males are co-existing

without aggressive behavior that

was previously seen at zoos and

wildlife parks in the U.S.

With the approval of local offi-
cials, the California Department

of Fish and Game, the U.S.

Department of Agriculture,

which oversees captive animals –

and numerous other agencies,

Derby and Stewart began con-
struction at ARK 2000 shortly

after they purchased the land.

With rolling hillsides and inu-

merable oak and evergreen trees,

the idyllic location was the per-

fect setting for an animal refuge.

At the onset, two 20,000-
square-foot barns were erected,

one for the African elephants

and the other for their Asian cousins.

Upon first stepping into the

African barn, many people men-
ten Steven Spielberg’s classic

“The Jurassic Park” film because the

fencing inside is so large, com-
plete with hydraulic gates and an

elephantine Jucuzzi.

Stewart designed the barns and

the oversized fencing that enclos-
es the elephant habitats. The

African barn has a heated floor,

but that wasn’t so the elephants’

feet remain toasty in chilly winter

months; it’s to help keep the

expansive room dry.

“It makes the barn easier to

keep clean,” Stewart said in

2002.

“ARK 2000 is a dream that

started a long time ago,” Derby

said at the sanctuary’s dedication

in 2002. “What you see here was

not easy to achieve.”

At the celebration – held before

any of the pachyderms had estab-
lished housekeeping in San

Andreas – Derby and Stewart
dedicated the Kay Mannes-

Turner Asian Elephant Habitat

and the Cynthia Moss African

Elephant Habitat.

Moss, who is regarded as one of

the leading authorities on wild

African elephants, said

PAWS has done more to

advance the cause of African

elephants than anyone.

“If you’re a captive elephant,”

Moss said at the time, “you want
to come live here.”

When PAWS took possession

of the site on Pool Station Road,

Derby and Stewart knew there

were some Mi-Wuk Indian burial