

Where Does the Journey Take You?

In September 2018, Melanie Stephens arrived in Sebastopol and parked her hand-built tiny home ten minutes from the Sebastopol Area Senior Center.

“I wanted to meet local people and learn about the area, so I toured the Sebastopol Area Senior Center (SASC) with Katie Davis. It was my first stop. I signed up to volunteer shortly after and started learning about this new community.”

Before arriving in Sebastopol, Melanie and her husband owned and operated a farm in New Hampshire for over thirty years. “We grew everything, vegetables, fruits, hay, and a pick-your-own apple orchard, and I loved it. Our lives were invested in that farm and our community.”



Farming is hard work, characterized by long days, unforeseen challenges, and limited financial returns. Melanie’s strong ‘can-do’ attitude and journey are inspiring. “We started in our 20s. We built everything: every barn and building, our home. We cultivated the land and gardens; whatever we needed, we built. And when we needed more income, I made things to sell at the apple orchard,” she shares.

In 2007, Melanie and her husband, Ben, sold their property in N.H. and relocated to Hawaii. A few years later, Ben passed. Uncertain about what was next, Melanie embarked on a six-month road trip around the U.S. Upon her return, she decided to build a tiny house for herself. Returning to her New Hampshire community, she began construction. “It was a fantastic project. I worked seven days a week, building, problem-solving, and looking forward to each day,” she remembers. “I had done a lot of construction, but had never been solely in charge of a project, but this time I was, and I loved it.”

After six months of tiny house construction, Melanie brought the tiny house to Ohio to care for her mother, who was transitioning to a live-in care facility. Melanie continued to work on the interior of her tiny home. Six months later, she relocated her tiny home to California, near the Delta, to be closer to her daughter.



Melanie started exploring. “The minute I came up Southern 116, into town, I could already feel it was right. A town with all the things you need and a very nice size.” Serendipitously, she came across a posting for a tiny house site to rent, near town. “Thank you, angel, or universe, or whatever, I found my new home and community,” Melanie remembers thinking.

Melanie volunteers at the SASC front desk one day a week, answering phone calls, greeting members and visitors, helping to orient them, assisting with organizational projects, managing laundry, reorganizing, and covering during staff meetings. Melanie shares, “I volunteer one day a week, it's perfect for me. And it keeps me motivated and engaged.”

Working at the front desk has given Melanie an awareness that each person is capable and worthy of respect, regardless of their stage in the aging journey. “People come in and they are impressed - they can feel the heart. I hear them compare it to other centers. SASC is really a fun and welcoming place. I am proud of all the staff and how everyone is treated here,” she happily shares.

Melanie has volunteered a lot throughout her life. In New Hampshire, she served as the head of the recycling committee and as Chair of a cooperative preschool. In Hawaii, she was part of the Rotary Club and a sustainability organization, focusing on outreach and education. “I believe in civic engagement. Recycling and sustainability are my passions, which led me to volunteering.”

“Volunteering at the senior center is a great place to hang out and hear what other people are into! I love that it’s open to anyone, young and old, and that membership isn’t required. It truly is a community resource,” Melanie shares. “I always think, when I pick up the phone after one ring, ‘it's nice when a person answers the phone.’ No pressing buttons to talk to a human!”

Thank you, Melanie, for being such a warm and inviting member of the team. You brighten everyone’s day with your caring ways.

To learn more about volunteer opportunities
Please visit us at
www.sebastopolseniorcenter.org

