

Community Connection Through Volunteering



Steve Bursch volunteers to give rides to elders who no longer drive. He does this generously through Sebastopol Area Senior Center's Assisted Free Rides Program. Steve picks up a client, or clients, for a pre-scheduled trip through the Sebastopol Area Senior Center.

A typical round-trip ride is 2 – 2 ½ hours. "Usually, the trip is to a doctor's appointment, in Santa Rosa from Sebastopol, or I might go to Guerneville and bring them to town. It often includes a few spontaneous errands," Steve shares.

SASC's Assisted Rides program provides over 1,800 rides to 140 seniors 60+ annually, with the support of volunteer drivers, throughout all of Sonoma County.

Not long ago, Steve agreed to drive from Sebastopol (his home) to Bodega Bay to pick up an elder and caregiver who had scheduled their trip. Steve left Sebastopol, arrived in Bodega Bay, and drove the couple back to Sebastopol to shop. A few added stops along the way, a post office, a pharmacy, and they were headed back to Bodega Bay. After dropping the couple at their home, while heading back, he realized, "That was a five-hour trip, and it was a lot of fun!"

"I like driving all these nice people to their medical appointments, or the store, or to run errands, it's an eclectic bunch to talk to, which I enjoy. I know it sounds trite, but it really makes me feel good. I get my endorphins going!"

Steve finds his volunteer work rewarding, and it's also flexible. "If I am busy, or have many appointments myself, or, like now, am preparing for a vacation, I drive less." When Steve is not busy, he volunteers to drive twice a week. "I often get the same people. It's good to continue conversations where we left off."

A self-proclaimed café latte fan, Steve, reflects on driving a client from Sebastopol to Santa Rosa for a medical appointment. After arrival, Steve passes the time doing Sudoku puzzles in his car. When the client returned, he asked her, "Straight home now?" She hesitated, asking, "Can we go out for a café latte?" Surprised and thrilled, Steve drove to one of his favorite cafes in Cotati. "It was a little out of the way, but we both enjoyed the ride and our time together," he shares joyfully.

Steve is undeniably easy to talk to and upbeat. When asked about what led him to find volunteer work, he shares, "Years ago, when I saw retirement looming in my future, I was asked what I planned to do when it finally came." Soon after that conversation, Steve serendipitously responded to an ad for volunteers at KRCB TV and radio station. Having radio experience while in college, it was a natural fit. Steve volunteered for 7 years as the audio technician for the Sonoma Spotlight show, while continuing to work full-time in computers. Steve lights up as he reminisces. "It was so cool. I loved doing the work there." After retiring, his volunteer radio work extended into "a bunch more years" as he enjoyed honing his editing skills for a prerecorded interview show.

How did you get involved with SASC?

A few years ago, after moving from the Sonoma Mountain to Sebastopol, Steve's wife mentioned to him a class about end-of-life issues, Dying to Talk About It, led by Dena Bliss. Intrigued, Steve signed up and soon began attending lunches and Friday brunches at the SASC Harvest Café. Steve was starting to feel a sense of connection to the Sebastopol community.



Then he noticed SASC's call for volunteer drivers. After talking to Aubri, he agreed to the background check. In late November 2023, Steve began volunteering as a driver for the Assisted Trip program.

Steve's genuine enthusiasm for life radiates, and his easy-going, adaptable attitude has served him through life's journeys. Trained as an electronics technician and stationed for a year with 25+ other men, on isolated duty on an island in Alaska, he proudly states, "I made it through 3 years, 10 months, and 19 days of service, just short of the 4-year duty I signed up for."

Discharged from the Coast Guard, he attended the University of Washington, where he earned a degree in psychology. Near the end of his schooling, he enrolled in a programming class. "Holy cow, this is great! I caught on so quickly. It was easy learning this new language!" Taking multiple courses in the subject, and inspired, he shares, "I found my calling late in the pursuit of my college degree, but it didn't keep me from a career in computers!"

Steve was fortunate that his education in psychology provided a perspective that complemented his technological expertise, leading to a successful and rewarding career in computer science. "I had a wonderful career!" he shares with great enthusiasm. Steve smiles as he shares the patent he and an astrophysics friend obtained after creating a telescope platform to track stars and planets, "It was fun, I really loved it, and it's fascinating that we did it after we retired."

Enjoying retirement thoroughly and his community in Sebastopol, Steve shares, "Volunteering is a time to pay back. However, there is a real need for these services. And it helps, AND I feel great about that!" Steve's story is a powerful reminder of the rewarding nature of giving back and the profound connections that can be built through simple acts of kindness.

Thank you, Steve!

You certainly do give a lot, and we are honored to have you on our volunteer team!



To request a ride or sign up to be a volunteer, please contact Aubri Lane, SASC's Transportation Coordinator, at (707) 827-8429