

Stern tapped as director of Habitat office

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By **TOM HENDERSON**

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Former Yamhill County Commissioner Mary Stern has been named executive director of Habitat for Humanity's McMinnville operation, replacing Gretchen Phelps.

Phelps left in December. Stern took over Monday.

Stern served as a county commissioner from 2003 to 2013. During the first four years of her tenure, she was on Habitat's local board of directors.

She has spent the past three years as a policy adviser for the Association of Oregon Counties, working on economic development and transportation issues from offices in Salem.

"Dealing with the needs of the community is something I've always been engaged in," she said. "I am always looking for ways to help people in need."

Stern has been serving on an Association of Oregon Counties subcommittee created in April to consider ways to foster more affordable housing. She is involved in efforts to expand the Yamhill County Gospel Rescue Mission, whose mission is to serve the homeless, and chaired the fundraising campaign that financed new Riverside Drive quarters for the Yamhill Community Action Partnership.

She said she's glad to return to McMinnville, where she has long made her home. "I really missed working with the hometown people," she said.

Stern added she's particularly passionate about local Habitat projects such as the Aspire subdivision in southeast McMinnville. "I drive by that Aspire development and think we need to get more housing built," she said.

A graduate of Westfield State University in Massachusetts, she earned a law degree from the Suffolk University Law School, also in Massachusetts, in 1991. Prior to winning election to the county board of commissioners, she held an administrative post at the federal prison in Sheridan.

Joanna Engle had been serving as interim director at Habitat during the six-month search for a successor to Phelps, who held the position for six years.

Affordable housing is increasingly important in McMinnville, Stern said, especially as the community grapples with a growing homeless population. "As we draw more attention for our beautiful downtown and area wineries, we need to focus on taking care of our own," she said.