

Habitat for Humanity

Rutland affiliate of Habitat for Humanity hires leader

By Patrick Mcardle Staff Writer May 24, 2022 0

The executive director of the Rutland Community Cupboard will be stepping down to become the first executive director for the Rutland County affiliate of Habitat for Humanity.

Its website describes Habitat as a “nonprofit organization that helps families build and improve places to call home” and said its members “believe affordable housing plays a critical role in strong and stable communities.”

Rebekah Stephens, who lives in Rutland, said she will start in her new position on June 1.

She said local Habitat members had reached out to her and suggested she might be a good fit with the organization. She noted that she already had been involved with Rutland’s Promise, which provides temporary emergency shelter for families in the local area.

“So housing and families and folks having access to adequate housing and safe housing is very near and dear to my heart. Habitat, being able to provide sustainable housing is really the answer to making sure that folks have availability to that type of housing,” she said.

Habitat is well-known for helping people who qualify to build their own homes. Many of the future owners contribute “sweat equity” by working with volunteers on the construction of the house.

Eric Solsaa, president of the board for the Rutland affiliate of Habitat, said Stephens, through her work with the cupboard and Rutland’s Promise, had demonstrated she was “excited about housing.”

“She’s totally mission-driven, and we know her to be a really hard worker that cares a lot about the community,” he said.

While Stephens said taking the position with Habitat was a “no-brainer,” she said, in a statement released over the weekend, she felt “blessed and grateful” for her time with the Community Cupboard.

“It was an amazing experience to be entrusted with the stewardship of this vital community organization. My heartfelt appreciation goes out to the volunteers for their hard work and dedication. They are truly the lifeblood of the organization,” she said.

Stephens said Monday she expects there will be a special place in her heart for the Rutland Community Cupboard.

“We have a wonderful community that supports these missions and being able to be part of the Rutland Community Cupboard for three years has been a blessing for me,” she said.

However, she said she thought the opportunity to become part of Habitat was the path she needed to take.

At Habitat, Stephens said she will bring her experience in bringing people together in a collaborative environment.

“I really believe that when a community steps up together, then they’re unstoppable,” she said.

Stephens added that she hoped the community would appreciate that Habitat volunteers and staff work very hard on the projects but that the families also make a vital contribution.

“They come to the table equally as passionate and advocating for sustainable housing for themselves and with that kind of engagement, you’re going to guarantee success. They’re putting their heart into it and when there’s heart involvement and when there’s energy and sweat equity, it’s going to be good because there’s ownership, right from the start and not just ownership of a home but pride and ownership of the whole project,” she said.

With the addition of their first executive director, Solsaa said the Rutland habitat leaders are hoping to extend their reach in Rutland County. He said he also hopes to provide more opportunities for volunteers to assist in the mission of providing safe, decent, and affordable housing.

Another goal is a “Brush with Kindness” program that Solsaa said was intended to make it easier for people to stay in their homes longer. One example of what the program might do

would be adding ramps so that a house is accessible to its occupants longer than it might have been otherwise.

Solsaa said the Rutland affiliate was having a “super exciting” time with work on a new home beginning about a month ago and the addition of a paid staff member.

“This is the year for Habitat here in Rutland County. We’re going to build on this steam and the support that (Habitat) International has given us to hire our first executive,” he said.

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