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Community News



## Sunnyvale remembers community historian and volunteer Jeanine Stanek





Longtime Sunnyvale volunteer Jeanine Stanek is seen standing on the veranda of the Sunnyvale Historical Museum back in 2014. Stanek, who received Sunnyvale's Lifetime Community Contribution award at the 49th Annual Murphy Awards in 2014, recently passed away after a two-year battle with leukemia. (File photograph by Jacqueline Ramseyer)

By **VICTORIA KEZRA** | vkezra@bayareanewsgroup.com | Bay Area News Group

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Jeanine Stanek is being remembered by the Sunnyvale community for her love of history, incredible memory and devotion to her friends and the city.

The community lost one of its most dedicated volunteers when Stanek died at age 84 on Aug. 19 after a two-year battle with leukemia. According to Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum volunteers, she was still helping out at her beloved museum just three weeks before her death.

Stanek contributed to a number of organizations and programs in the city, including the Sunnyvale School District, the Fremont Union High School District Foundation, the League of Women Voters, Girl Scouts and Leadership Sunnyvale. However, she is perhaps best known as co-founder of the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum and as part of the Sunnyvale Historical Society.

“We’re very grateful that so many people have gotten so much from their relationships with her and were able to appreciate what she was able to do for the community,” said daughter Sarah Stanek, one of her five children.

Stanek grew up in Bethesda, Maryland and served as class vice president for the latter half of her high school years at Bethesda Chevy Chase High School. She went to college in 1950 at the University of Maryland to earn a degree in history and a teaching credential. Forging a habit that would carry her through life, she became a voracious volunteer. She gave time to the school newspaper, yearbook, literary magazine and theater.

While teaching middle school English, social studies and geography in Silver Spring, Maryland, she returned to graduate school, where she met future husband Mark Stanek, who was working on his PhD in chemistry. In 1956 they moved to New Jersey, where she joined the League of Women Voters.

The young family made its way to Irvine in Southern California in 1967. The Staneks settled in Sunnyvale for good in 1973.

Sarah Stanek recalled that her mother had always been fiercely independent, often doing things that women of the time didn't typically do.

“Even though it wasn’t necessarily common for young women at the time to do things like go to college, live on their own and move a family across the country, she was so determined to do all those things. My sisters and nieces sometimes can take for granted those things, but we more and more think, ‘Wow, Mom was doing that in the 40s,’” she said, adding that her mother received encouragement and loving support from her husband.

“He was the type of man, even in the ’50s, who said, ‘Of course you are going to the League of Women Voters meeting and I’m going to take care of the kids,’” she said.

In 2000 after the death of her husband, Stanek increased her volunteer efforts, taking a part-time position as an aide at a special education preschool in the Sunnyvale School District. She oversaw the move of artifacts and building of exhibits for the new Heritage Park Museum, which opened in 2008. She continued volunteering there for the next nine years.

In 2014 Stanek was recognized with a Murphy Lifetime Community Contribution Award from the Sunnyvale Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce, only the third such award ever presented in the city.

Friends and family said she quickly became an expert in city history. Councilman Larry Klein is former president of the historical society, but said he first met Stanek when looking for information on his home, which he said is in the historic district of the city.

Klein said that meeting with Stanek reignited his love of history. He admired her deep breadth of knowledge.

“I’ve always been somewhat of a history buff, but all things Sunnyvale is what she got me to enjoy. Her love for history was infectious. She had a positive attitude and endless energy,” said Klein, who described her as “the mind and soul” of the Sunnyvale Heritage Park Museum.

Stanek’s friends at the museum remember her as someone with an incredible memory who did any task that needed to be done without complaint and with a sense of calm.

“The world could be crashing around our ears, and she seemed to be okay. ‘I’ll make a list’ is what she always said,” recalled Betty Rountree, a fellow museum volunteer.

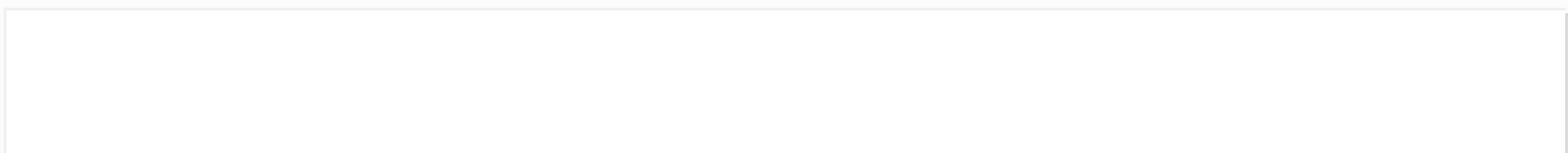
Laura Babcock, director of the Heritage Park Museum, recalled witnessing that calm demeanor one morning a couple years ago when the orchard around the museum flooded. A clogged drain resulted in water pooling up around the property.

“She calmly comes back (into the museum), puts plastic bags on her feet, goes out with a rake and gets the stuff off the top of the drain,” Babcock recalled.

Babcock said Stanek not only had a “steel trap memory” but had an affinity for bringing out the best in people.

“She was good at drawing out what you were good at and having you do that,” Babcock said.

A service was held Aug. 26 at the Lima & Campagna Sunnyvale Mortuary, with a reception at the Heritage Park Museum. Donations in Stanek’s memory can be made to the Sunnyvale Historical Society and Museum Association at [heritageparkmuseum.org](http://heritageparkmuseum.org) or to Sunnyvale Community Services at [svcommunityservices.org](http://svcommunityservices.org).



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