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Bonnie Burch: Local girl treasures ties to center's seniors

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Sarah Stephens, FiftyForward College Grove Center director. / Submitted

Written by **Bonnie Burch** The Tennessean

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The seniors at the FiftyForward College Grove Center don't just sit in their rocking chairs and play cards, although there is quite a bit of card playing from time to time.

Last week alone, the seniors began a new social media computer class, kept active with Zumba and Yopalates lessons, traveled to hear the Nashville Symphony, painted during a creative arts class and held their twice-a-year fundraising pancake breakfast and bake sale.

"We've got a variety of activities including exercise and fitness. There's even someone who will come in to give them a massage once a week, if that's something they'd like," said Sarah Stephens, who became center director last spring.

One thing that impressed me was that Stephens is a relatively young 31 years old, yet she just has an affinity for seniors. She was program director for eight years before becoming center director.

"I have a good relationship with them because I'm from the community and grew up here. So many of our members know my family and have for years. Of course, there are many new people that have moved in to live with children, too," she said.

Stephens' connection to the center goes back much further in her life. While a teenager and senior class member at Page High School, she formed friendships with the senior citizens at the College Grove Center as part of the intergenerational Senior to Senior program. And as a Belmont college student, she also did an internship there.

Stephens helped out her father, Jimmy King, on his farm off Arno-Allisona Road at a young



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"Being with the people," she said. "We've got a good staff team — I'm one of three staff members — and a good group of volunteers."

The College Grove Center, housed in a former elementary school building, is one of seven senior activity centers operated by the nonprofit FiftyForward organization for those ages 50 and older. The rural facility is also one of two FiftyForward locations in Williamson County. The other is the Martin Center in Brentwood.

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age. In fact, she still lives there and assists her father in raising beef cattle and growing the crops. They sell sweet corn in the summer and pumpkins in the fall at the Franklin Farmers' Market.

"Sarah's story is a sweet one and testifies that we don't always have to go far from home to find success," said Libby Beeson, College Grove Center's program director.

When asked why she enjoys working at the center, Stephens is quick with her answer.

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