

## Expert in the Field: Gretchen Lizotte

*By Ellen Waldman*

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We have an abundance of riches in experience, expertise, and good-heartedness in Ashland. It seems like a good idea to share some of these great people with you through this column. They will be our “expert in the field” and it begins here today.

There is also a way you can contribute to this column. If you have a particular question on a topic related to aging, with a local slant, please send it in. I’ll do my best to answer it and get input from other local experts. This will be the “Q&A, Questions and Advice” section.

Today’s column features Gretchen Lizotte. Since recent columns addressed housing options in Ashland, I asked Gretchen about her experiences. She is well qualified to talk about retirement living. Since 2005, she has held professional positions at Linda Vista in Ashland, Wynwood of Rogue Valley and Veranda Park in Medford, Pioneer Village in Jacksonville, and Emeritus at the Springs in Grants Pass.

Currently, she is the community relations director at Mountain Meadows in Ashland. Clearly, she knows this arena.

Q. What are some of the reasons people move into retirement living facilities?

A. At Mountain Meadows (MM) and other places, many are relocating to be near their children. They want to be in a setting that supports them and they get that in a community. Some have lost their spouse, and it’s easier to find sharing activities in a community setting. They are also looking for social connections, classes, and interest groups. It might also be too hard to live at home any longer. The challenges for making dinner, or going to events or activities like the gym, are more arduous. They can spend less time on logistics and more on enjoying themselves.

Q. What do they find after they move in that they did not expect?

A. Many seem shocked by the altruism and concern for the welfare of others they find here. They are amazed by the warmth and support. At MM they can impact their area of interest by joining committees, and they are happy with the level of control they have that way. There is an assistance team and resident volunteers, so when something unexpected happens, there is help.

Q. What is different about this retirement community from others you worked in?

A. In a nutshell, at MM you buy your own property. Residents truly own it, run it and love it. It’s their motto. They have an actual board of directors, and 12 different committees to participate on, like parking, activities, fitness, etc. It’s a true democracy, not a corporate group making decisions.

Q. What are some of the challenges for people in these facilities?

A. At MM, people often like things to be very clear-cut, but it’s a democratic process here. That means it might take time and diligence to get an answer. In this system, people have to make proposals, be

approved, etc. All their requests go through a board of directors. Other challenges are things like dining expectations and transportation. There is one day of shopping transportation only.

Q. What are some causes for people to move out?

A. If one spouse was the main caregiver and they pass on, then the remaining spouse needs more help. The truth of the matter becomes revealed. Their higher care needs might inhibit their ability to participate in activities. They might be more comfortable in an intimate setting. We honor where they are in life when they move in, and also when it changes. Some individuals leave due to progressive dementia.

Q. What do you personally like about working in retirement facilities?

A. I love sharing experiences with individuals who have time in their life to be more present and slow down. They have wisdom to share with me. Everyday, I encounter someone who, just by being in their presence, affords me quality interactions. I adore that. I'm a type-A, but I have residents who surround me and remind me that this is now and this is your life. I love that. It creates a pause button for me. Sit and "be" more.

In our local community, it's people like Gretchen we can rely on to provide us with real help and guidance. How fortunate!