

Stephens helps to keep school's garden growing



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN

Pat Stephens stands Nov. 21 in the garden of Gabilan Elementary School in Soledad. With Stephens are volunteers Idalys Perez, back-ground, from left, Emmanuel Alonzo, Ricky Silva, Coral Ortiz, Adrianna Longoria and Adriana Alfaro.

By **THAIS SHUBIN**
For The Salinas Californian

PAT STEPHENS

- **AGE:** 57
- **JOB:** Librarian for Gabilan Elementary School
- **YOUTH INVOLVEMENT:** Garden Club Adviser
- **EDUCATION:** Studied English at California State University, Fresno
- **PERSONAL:** Married to Graig, has three children and four grandchildren

Pat Stephens plants seeds of knowledge during Gabilan Elementary School's Garden Club meetings.

The school librarian started Gabilan's garden almost eight years ago, when she noticed the school grounds could use some sprucing up.

"I had a conversation with the superintendent at the time, and he agreed that the school should start a garden," Stephens said.

A supportive principal, Soledad Union School District board and grant money helped make that garden a reality. It now includes a butterfly garden and raised planters that will soon sprout lettuce, peas,

and carrots.

"We just finished planting our vegetables," said the active Soledad community member. "The children are learning to compare the different seeds."

Three days a week, Stephens supervises students as they work in the garden. On weekends, she and her husband, Graig, often put in long hours pulling weeds, installing sprinklers and keeping up the gar-

den's basic maintenance.

Stephens attributes her love for the outdoors to her grandmother, who she said always had a beautiful garden and taught her the art of composting. It's a lesson she is passionate about with Garden Club members.

"My grandmother never threw anything away. All of her coffee grounds, eggshells, everything went back into the

soil," Stephens said. "Today, I think that lesson is so valuable to teach the children, because ultimately they will have to be responsible for the waste that is produced in the world."

Along with the Garden Club, Stephens serves on the Soledad City Council, is president of the Soledad Health Care District Foundation, and is a member of a policy committee for the league of California Cities.

She and her husband came to Soledad in 1974.

They have three grown children and are awaiting their fifth grandchild.

Stephens said she hopes the garden and its life lessons will resonate with her students and inspire them to make a difference.



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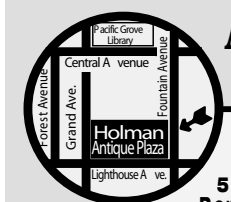
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