

## Good Neighbors Make Good Neighborhoods

*An inside look at Barb Kummerfeldt, Stepping On Peer Leader in New Glarus, WI*



When you walk into Maple Leaf Cheese and Chocolate in downtown New Glarus, you probably have one thing on your mind – satiating your sweet tooth! Owner Barb Kummerfeldt will surely sell you a piece of fudge, but she will also give you invaluable advice on preventing a fall...

Barb is a volunteer peer leader for a falls prevention program called “Stepping On”. Stepping On started in Green County in 2013. As an evidence-based program, it is proven to reduce falls in seniors by 31%. Barb, who has lived in New Glarus since 1998, has been working to improve her balance for just as long!

“My whole life I have had trouble with balance” says Barb, “I have taken Tai Chi and now Stepping On to do everything I can to compensate.” Barb became a peer leader after successfully completing and encouraging others in a Stepping On class in Monroe. “She was always telling other participants: “don’t give up - figure out another way!” and then sharing a story of her own,” says Stephanie Hafez, Stepping On Leader.

Stories are a big part of Stepping On; in fact, each participant is asked in the first class to share a story about falling and what happened. As a peer leader, Barb is able to give advice through her stories as she constantly is creatively fitting balance and strength exercises into her busy schedule and has never let her balance hold her back. At age 81, Barb still continues to travel with her husband in the RV, use public transportation in the bigger cities, and is not afraid to brave a crowd to see the sights.

“My favorite part of being a peer leader is knowing that I can inspire someone else,” says Barb, “I wanted them to know if I can do it, so can they. I also know it’s a lot easier to learn from a peer.” One way Barb continues to challenge and improve her balance is by building the exercises into her daily tasks. If you watch closely, you may see her taking side-steps at the sales counter

or while stocking cheese at the Maple Leaf. She also regularly does heel-raises or tandem standing when she is stuck at the register on a busy day.

Barb is a prime example of being aware of your surroundings and using them, like she does, helps improve her balance and strength - and is the way to maintaining independence. When asked about the biggest lesson she has learned from the class, Barb says, “Awareness, awareness, awareness! If this class teaches you anything, it is that you are more aware.”

We would like to thank Barb for her time and commitment to the program, and the countless stories she has and is willing to share. It’s leaders like her that makes these programs possible. The Aging & Disability Resource Center and Stepping On program would like to encourage you to consider a Stepping On class to help improve your balance, strength, and awareness of falls as you age.