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She has a green thumb

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Working with numbers and calculations is far cry from digging in rich soil and planting gardens, so you could say that Ellen Solomon took a circuitous route to her present career in horticulture.

"I have a bachelor's in accounting," says Solomon, workshop coordinator for Petaluma Bounty. "I worked as a legal secretary and I worked for the government for a while. I even taught as a dance therapist. I was a tax accountant, but I'd always been interested in trees."

Solomon spent time traveling, stopping by gardens on her trips.

"I always visited gardens," she says. "I went several times to the south of France and really studied the gardens there near the Mediterranean."

When her circumstances changed, she found herself following her passion and starting a new career.

"My first job as a professional gardener was in a rose garden about 15 years ago near Grass Valley," she says. "There were three of us, pruning, weeding and 'deadheading' (removing the dead rose blossoms). At the same time, I was growing a garden in the country, trying all kinds of things."

The work appealed to her so much that she wanted to learn more. She took classes at Sierra College, where she learned about becoming an arborist.

"There's no straight path, and you have to have a lot of strength," says Solomon, adding, "I then completed the program in environmental horticulture at Sierra College to become a certified arborist."

She studied sustainability and environmentalism, as well as learning the care and maintenance of trees. She became so well-versed in gardening lore that writing and teaching about it seemed like the logical next step. She wrote articles about trees and garden design aimed at "ordinary people who love nature and want to care for trees and gardens."

She taught for Sierra College community education, Peaceful Valley and the Apple Center for Sustainable Living.

In 2008, Solomon founded the Friends of Trees Nevada County for which she later



john o'hara

Ellen Solomon is a certified arborist, horticulturalist and landscape designer.

served as the executive director. She created the Nevada City Tree Tour, a walking tour of Nevada City's trees, aided by a grant from their city council.

Solomon moved to Petaluma to be closer to family in 2010.

"A lot of people thought it was a crazy thing to do. I didn't know anyone," she says.

Once settled in, however, she found her tree and horticulture expertise well-suited to her new community. Solomon hung out her shingle as Northbay Horticulture and offered her services to Petaluma Bounty, where she serves as workshop coordinator for Petaluma Bounty's Community Farm.

She still teaches classes, noting that her next class, "Planning and Planting in Small Spaces," is from 2 to 4 p.m. April 21 at 301 Seventh St.

What's growing in Solomon's garden currently?

"I've got spinach and lettuce coming up with garlic, tomatoes and onions just getting started," she says.

She still writes occasional pieces, "Mostly about trees and gardening," she says, adding, "I like to walk around and meet people outside."

Solomon would like to put together a tree tour of Petaluma some day and says if asked for advice, she'd say, "Walk more, avoid plastic and grow your own."

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