

SPRING 2010

OPAL ANNUAL REPORT 2009

HOUSING ISLAND PEOPLE, HELPING TO MAINTAIN ISLAND CHARACTER

OUR 20TH YEAR: MAJOR MILESTONES AND UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

Last year OPAL Community Land Trust served more people than ever before. A dozen households were added to our wait list; 19 individuals and families achieved the dream of owning a home; 39 people participated in homebuyer counseling; and 92 islanders were helped with one-time rental and energy assistance through OPAL. In total, 162 Orcas households were served – more than one-and-a-half times the number in 2008, and almost 50 percent more than the average of the prior four years.

Given the events of last year, these numbers are not so surprising. The first 18 houses were completed in the new Wild Rose Meadow neighborhood. The local economic downturn caused more people to seek rent and energy assistance. The island's need for affordable housing – and OPAL's wait list – continued to grow.

But the real story is the one behind the numbers. When the financial world turned upside down, the work of putting people in houses substantially changed.



Lety Hopper, left, and Julie Brunner meet with everyone seeking OPAL housing.

Julie Brunner, OPAL's housing manager since 2002, explained: "The lending market is always evolving, but the changes in the last 12 months have been far more dramatic than usual. The current environment makes it harder for buyers and harder for OPAL staff. There are always hoops to jump through, but now there are more hoops than ever before."

Julie has seen several things happening that make it more difficult to close sales. Because of the downturn in the economy, buyers are now less qualified. They may have recently lost a job or had their hours cut. While they met the requirements for a mortgage loan a year ago, they now no longer qualify.

Buyers are also less confident. People on the wait list are often choosing to wait longer, even when an OPAL house is available. They are worried about possible layoffs and loss of income in the future, and are not ready to commit to the responsibility of a mortgage.

Finally, mortgage loans are more difficult to get. "Some homebuyers are ready, but banks are nervous about lending," Julie said. "For example, buyers may be eligible and qualified. We submit a loan application in March, and in April the lending rules change. Our buyers are no longer qualified."

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FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT: HELEN BEE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A “MEMBER” OF OPAL?

Every one of you who is reading this is a “member” of OPAL, but just what does that mean?

At the most basic level, being a member of OPAL means that you are a part owner of all the land on which OPAL’s houses, offices and apartments sit. Together we hold this land in trust for the community – which is precisely what “community land trust” means. Collectively, we share the responsibility to ensure that the land – and the houses on that land – remain a part of the community forever.



Photo by Chris Senn

Helen Bee

Being a member also means that you have the right to vote – for board members or for bylaw changes or on any other question that may come before us collectively at the annual meeting or special meetings of the membership.

It also means that you have a voice in what we do. You can increase the volume of your voice by occasionally coming to a board meeting (the second Thursday of each month, 5 to 7 pm), attending the annual meeting, stopping by the office with questions or comments, or volunteering your time to help with the annual auction, or to stuff envelopes, or to serve on any one of several committees.

How did you become a member? At any given moment, OPAL’s membership is made up of everyone who has contributed to the organization in some fashion in the past 12 months. The most common form of contribution is a donation of dollars, but we also count you as a member if you donated your time, or energy, or skill, such as by baking a pie for the summer pie booth or a cake for the auction.

We do our best to keep you all informed about what we are doing, what we are thinking of doing, and what we need. And we count on you to speak up if you disagree, or to suggest ideas or initiatives. Without all of you, OPAL could not exist. Thank you for joining us in sustaining this organization and this idea.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: LISA BYERS



Lisa Byers

In the fall 2009 newsletter I wrote that OPAL hoped to hire an “operations manager,” a new position to help address our growing responsibilities for stewardship. With the downturn in the economy, we concluded that we did not have sufficient funding to hire someone on staff. Instead we hired Leslie Rae on a contract basis to help address a number of backlogged projects. One project is creating a homeowner’s manual on the internet. Working with Michael Sky, Leslie is compiling a reference library of documents and links to help OPAL homeowners maintain their homes. The library will include house plans, site plans, appliance manuals and warranties, checklists and tips for maintenance, as well as links to other community resources for topics like disposing of household hazardous wastes. This is one more step in the direction of providing more support for our existing homeowners.

OUR 20TH YEAR: MAJOR MILESTONES AND UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

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The result is more turnover in the buying process. “In the past, if 10 buyers were approved, qualified, ready to buy, 80 percent would eventually purchase,” said Julie. “Now only six make it to closing, and the last four sales are harder to nail down.”

Yet even in this tough environment, a record 19 low- and moderate-income islanders were able to buy OPAL houses in 2009 – more than the prior four years combined.

One reason for this is the comprehensive homebuyer education and financial counseling that OPAL provides. “Sometimes people walk in with beautiful credit,”



Celebrating 20 years: OPAL CLT’s 20th anniversary celebration in May 2009 included a parade. Kids and adults decorated “houses”, made banners, and carried earth balls around the Wild Rose Meadow neighborhood.

said Julie. “But other times people walk in and their credit needs a lot of work. I explain how they can fix it. I work with some folks every month. Some go away and I never see them again. Others come back in a few years, ready to buy.”

As OPAL’s housing manager, Julie is involved at every step, from initial application through closing. She determines eligibility and looks at each buyer’s total financial picture. She finds the right lender (sometimes there are two or three). She shepherds everything through and sits with the buyers and escrow agent when the final papers are signed.

While all 14 houses in the second phase of Wild Rose Meadow were previously spoken for, three houses are now available because buyers have dropped out. Even in this difficult financial environment, Julie encourages anyone who thinks they may qualify to come in and talk with her.

MORE ISLANDERS IN NEED OF RENTAL AND ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Two important services that OPAL provides the Orcas community are administering the rental- and energy-assistance programs on the island. Funding for these programs comes from a number of different sources – federal, state and local – with each program having its own specific requirements.

The good news is that more money has been available, so OPAL was able to assist more islanders than ever before in 2009. The bad news is that yearly funding typically runs out, so there is no help available at certain times of the year.

Last year 29 Orcas households received one-time assistance with monthly rent. This was more than twice the number in each of the previous two years. In addition, a record 63 low-income households received money to help pay heating bills.

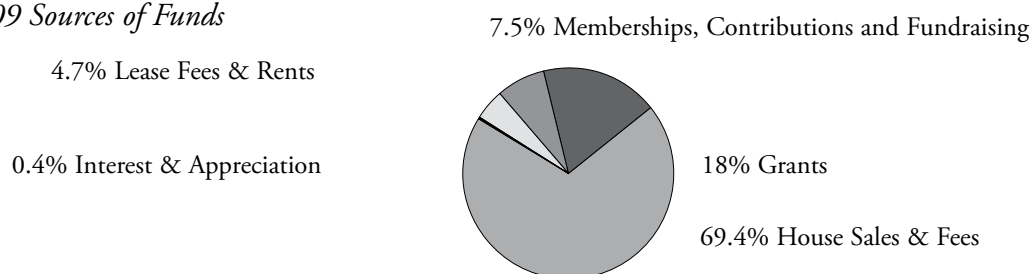
Lety Hopper, OPAL’s housing services coordinator, is in charge of administering both programs. “The past year has been challenging,” explained Lety, “because of an increased number of applicants and limited funding sources, each with its own application and rules. I have had to turn people away.” However, at this point in 2010, there is still some help available. “I currently have energy funds for low-income households,” Lety said. “There is also money to provide one-time help to island renters with small children who are facing eviction.”

OPAL Community Land Trust

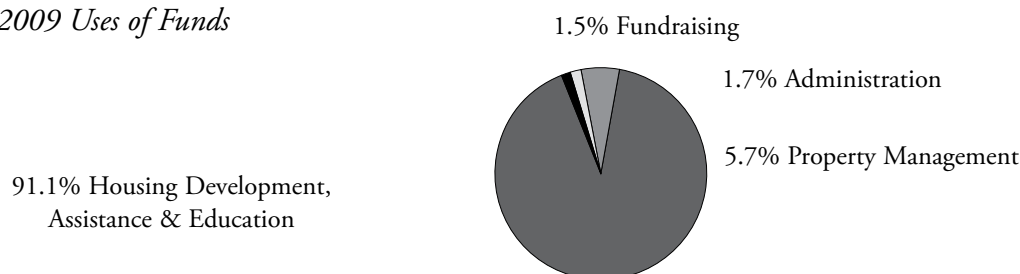
2009 ABBREVIATED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES
with comparison to 2008

Revenues:	2009	2008	Functional Expenses:	2009	2008
Lease Fees, Rents, Applications, Consulting	\$195,215	\$163,470	Housing Development	\$3,611,563	\$3,464,194
Memberships, Contributions and Fundraising	\$313,819	\$453,616	Property Management	\$227,086	\$181,437
House Sales & Fees	\$2,893,982	\$306,518	Housing Assist. & Ed.	\$26,918	\$18,962
Grants	\$751,597	\$1,086,037	Fundraising	\$59,063	\$53,319
Interest & Loan Fund Appreciation	\$16,266	\$22,052	Administration	\$69,332	\$41,839
Total Revenues:	\$4,170,879	\$2,031,693	Total Functional Expenses:	\$3,993,962	\$3,759,750
			Increase (Decrease) in Unrestricted Net Assets: \$1,255,711 \$1,476,890		

2009 Sources of Funds



2009 Uses of Funds



2009 ABBREVIATED STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
with comparison to 2008

Assets:	2009	2008	Liabilities:	2009	2008
Current Assets	\$1,421,271	\$2,603,300	Current Liabilities	\$1,061,233	\$1,903,376
Long-Term Assets			Long-Term Liabilities	\$1,899,332	\$1,690,741
Land	\$2,849,708	\$2,830,389	Net Assets:		
Improvements	\$5,873,117	\$4,368,746	Unrestricted	\$764,711	\$3,311,848
Notes Receivable – Long-Term	\$617,857	\$322,741	Board Designated	\$6,679,768	\$2,882,815
Pledges Receivable – Not Current	\$0	\$14,618	Temporarily Restricted	\$297,216	\$293,651
			Permanently Restricted	\$59,693	\$57,363
Total Assets:	\$10,761,953	\$10,139,794	Total Liabilities & Net Assets:	\$10,761,953	\$10,139,794

The full financial audit prepared by Sanders and Sanders CPAs, PSC, is on file at the OPAL office.

JEANNE BECK

Jeanne Beck, who recently returned to work for OPAL, has lived on Orcas for the past 20 years. In that time she has worked for a series of island nonprofits, bringing each organization her gifts as a problem-solver, grant writer and effective planner.

Jeanne's first job on the island was actually with OPAL, so she has come full circle. In late 1990, she became OPAL's first paid executive director, and served in that role during the construction of OPAL's first neighborhood, Opal Commons, and during the preparation for the second neighborhood, Bonnie Brae.

Jeanne left OPAL to work for Children's House, where she helped write the grants that funded their Family Resource Center and Infant Toddler Center. While at Children's House she was also instrumental in writing the first "Readiness to Learn" grant, for a program still in existence at the public school. Completing her trifecta of jobs supporting the island's children, she then went to The Funhouse, where she stayed for seven years, doing program development and serving for some years as executive director.

Through all those years, Jeanne has remained a supporter of OPAL and has watched the organization – and the island's attitude toward affordable housing – mature. In her return to OPAL, as construction supervisor for phase II of the Wild Rose Meadow and project manager for renovating the Lavender Hollow apartments (after OPAL purchases them), she brings the grace and humor she has brought to every one of her challenging jobs. She sees her role as one of "setting the focus and pace, of moving the ball down the field," so that important things get accomplished. We are delighted to have her back applying her great skills on OPAL's behalf.



Jeanne Beck enjoyed climbing the Great Wall of China between Orcas assignments.

ISLANDERS EMPLOYED AT WILD ROSE MEADOW;

COMPLETING THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS ON SCHEDULE FOR OCTOBER

When general contractor Terra Firma, NW, signed on with OPAL for construction of Phase II of Wild Rose Meadow, it also meant work for other island contractors and suppliers. The list includes Orcas Excavators, Happy Acres, Inc., Orcas Electric, San Juan Island-based ACL Plumbing, Orcas Drywall, Inc. (which is doing drywall and painting), Kucklick Landscape and Design, and Island Sheetmetal and Gutter. Suppliers include Island Hardware and Supply, and Sea Island Sand and Gravel. OPAL is pleased to help the local economy during the current recession.

Phase II of Wild Rose Meadow is scheduled for completion in October. The first new homeowners could occupy their houses as soon as late April. As of March, roofing, water, sewer and electric were in various stages of completion in all 12 houses. Early-to-be-occupied units were getting drywall and siding.

MEET THE MEMBERS

SANDI BURT

As a licensed clinical social worker and resident of Lahari Ridge, Sandi Burt sees our island community from multiple perspectives.

You will find her at the elementary school 24 hours a week. Sandi's roles at school are funded in part by the Orcas Island Prevention Partnership and in part by a Readiness to Learn grant.



Sandi Burt in the school counseling office with Gypsy, a miniature American Eskimo and Hurricane Katrina survivor. Sandi and her 13-year-old daughter, Maya, adopted the dog from a person who rescues this particular breed.

As school counselor, Sandi trains parents and volunteers in two curricula that help students with relationship and life skills. These programs focus on empathy, impulse control and anger management, as well as personal integrity and character building. The goal is to reduce bullying and other destructive behavior and to lower the risk for early substance abuse and sexual activity. She also leads support groups on friendship skills and impulse control, and for students in separating, divorcing or stepfamily-blending homes.

Sandi is also the school's Readiness to Learn advocate. This program supports parents and students when struggles at home affect a child's ability to learn.

The other two days a week, Sandi has her own private therapy practice, working with individuals, couples, children and families in Friday Harbor and at Full Circle Counseling in Eastsound. She also subcontracts with Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services (DVSAS) to provide counseling to people who have been sexually abused, and, through the Family Options Program, to prevent violence in families experiencing high conflict or separation/divorce.

"Because of the downturn in the economy, many families are struggling right now," Sandi explained. "Some businesses have closed and people have lost their jobs. Others are running out of work. As a result, there is increased stress and more family conflict."

When island families need help, Sandi links them with available resources. Her referrals to OPAL for energy and rental assistance have doubled this year. She has requested more coats than ever before from Island Hardware & Supply's "Coats for Kids" program. She has also seen an increase in the level of coordination among island organizations. To help a family, she may contact the food bank, DVSAS, the Orcas Family Connections program, island churches, employers, landlords, and the medical community, and even enlist teachers and friends.

As an OPAL resident and volunteer since 2001, Sandi knows first-hand the difference affordable housing can make. "I often refer families to OPAL and encourage them to get on OPAL's wait list," said Sandi. "Before moving into an OPAL neighborhood, I lived in eight rentals in seven years. Without OPAL, there would be 84 vulnerable Orcas families doing the rental shuffle, and many who now own OPAL homes wouldn't have stayed."

SHAPE THE FUTURE OF ORCAS ISLAND

Through your support of OPAL, you have helped your friends and neighbors acquire affordable homes on Orcas Island. Your gifts have given the teachers, the bakers, the artisans, nurses, construction workers, waiters, grocery-store clerks and so many more the chance to live and work in our island community.

Here's a chance to continue that generosity "when your will matures," by participating now in OPAL's legacy giving planning. It may be as simple as a bequest in your will, or as complex as a charitable remainder trust. What matters is that many legacies add up, and collectively we can ensure that Orcas Island will continue to have permanently affordable homes well into the future.

When OPAL joined other island nonprofits at the Orcas Island Community Foundation (OICF) Endow Orcas training in 2008, we learned of the importance of legacy donations. We spent time developing and implementing our plan in 2009.

OPAL has created two funds: a Stewardship Endowment, and a Development Seed Fund. The income from the stewardship endowment will help to sustain



OPAL's core responsibilities to the land, the homeowners and the community. The development seed fund will be used to purchase land for future development as appropriate parcels became available. You may choose to leave a legacy to either of these funds, or simply let the OPAL board use your gift in whatever way they think best.

Your legacy gift will help to ensure that the island community remains rich and diverse for the next generation and for many generations to come. If you would like to discuss this further or explore possibilities, please call Lisa Byers at 376-3191 to request a brochure or to have a conversation about your legacy to the island and to OPAL.

LAVENDER HOLLOW

The process to finalize the sale and transfer to OPAL continues to move at a snail's pace due to a backlog at the USDA Rural Development office. USDA holds the current mortgage on the 22-unit apartment complex and must approve the transfer. Once again Wally Gudgell and his business partners have demonstrated patience and generosity by extending their timeline to accommodate the delays. Executive director Lisa Byers hopes everything will be finalized in time to commence the renovation later this year.

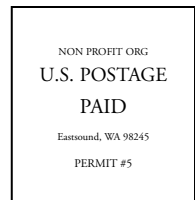
The mission of OPAL Community Land Trust is to acquire and own land so that islanders in need may have access to permanently affordable homes and workplaces. OPAL collaborates with others, develops improvements and stewards the land in a manner that is cooperative, stable, environmentally sensitive and socially responsible.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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IN THIS ISSUE

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SAVE THE DATES: Wild Rose Meadow Open House followed by OPAL Annual Meeting – April 17th
OPAL Benefit Auction & Dinner – October 16

Save the Date for the Auction, Saturday, October 16

Saturday, October 16, will be the day to put on your finest party wear for OPAL's Soirée *Under the Sea* annual dinner and auction, which will be held at Orcas Center.

In addition, we have something new up our sleeves, which we'll tell you about before long. "Watch your email this summer. We think you'll find something very cool there," promise Helen Bee and Kari Van Gelder, auction co-chairs.

Join us on Saturday, April 17th

Wild Rose Meadow Open House

3 to 5 p.m.

OPAL CLT Annual Meeting

5 to 8 p.m.

Emmanuel Episcopal Church Parish Hall, Eastsound

- Potluck: Please bring a salad or dessert to share.
- We'll have soup and bread.
- Keep it "green!" Bring your own bowl, plate, cup and utensils.
- We'll have short business meeting followed by awards and entertainment.
- Enjoy our Orcas community!

Note: This would be a good time to make sure OPAL has your current email information.