

Suriadi Burns' Journey to Home

In April, 2022, as the specter of COVID-19 continued to cast a shadow over the globe, Suriadi Burns took an audacious leap of faith. Leaving her native Bali, Indonesia, she migrated with her three children, Sarah, Maria, and Thomas, to the United States. Her drive was fueled by a determination to secure a brighter future and superior educational opportunities for her children.

“ This year we will celebrate as community, as a family.”

– Suriadi Burns



Suriadi Burns and her children, sharing laughter and smiles on their porch, a testament to their journey toward a brighter future.

Arriving on Orcas Island, a stark contrast to Bali, they shared a small cabin and trailer with a friend. Despite the close quarters, **the family of four, bound by love**, made the best of their year-round life.

Before finding their new home at an OPAL residence, they encountered several challenges. They grappled with maintaining essential

infrastructures like water and septic systems, tasks often taken for granted by most residents. These became particularly challenging in the face of freezing weather. Eventually, circumstances necessitated a move from this first island home, testing their resilience.

However, their circumstances improved significantly when they relocated to the townhomes of April's Grove.

Conveniently found near schools and within walking distance of the town center, their new dwelling quickly transformed into a cherished sanctuary.

“It's not merely a building. It's our home,” Suriadi declared, her face radiant with joy.

Suriadi reached a significant turning point on May 8, 2023. On her birthday, she stepped into their new house in April's Grove. The joy of finally having a secure place turned her birthday into a celebration of unforgettable proportions. With just a sleeping bag and a pillow, she was filled with a profound sense of belonging, a euphoric realization of finally having a home she could call her own.

Suriadi juggles three jobs to keep up with expenses. During the daytime, she works at Kingfish Inn. At night, she serves at Mijitas Mexican Kitchen restaurant. On weekends, Suriadi returns to the role of mom and caretaker.

Suriadi's resilience shines through, as she recounts her experiences, stating that the hardships she endured in her earlier housing situations have not broken her;

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OPAL expresses gratitude to OICF as OPAL will take ownership of the Pea Patch property.

Pea Patch Update: OPAL to Acquire Land This Fall

With approval by the boards of all four participating organizations, OPAL will become the new owner of the Pea Patch property in Eastsound, with the sale closing this fall.

Acquiring the 11-acre parcel, an effort initiated by the Community Foundation, marks the first step in an ongoing collaboration by the Food Bank, the Community Resource Center, and OPAL to address homelessness and provide a better safety net for islanders. **The land will be a part of OPAL Community Land Trust, held in trust for the benefit of the Orcas community.**

“The decision that OPAL assumes ownership speaks to the trust our fellow organizations have in us and in the community land trust model,” explained Lisa Byers, OPAL executive director. “It reflects our experience in owning and managing land on Orcas for 35 years. Taking this on goes to the very heart of our values of serving the needs of our community.”

The land purchase and future coordinated efforts will offer a permanent, expanded home for the Food Bank, a new home for the Community Resource Center with convenient access to support services and a day-use center for islanders living in unstable or substandard situations, and 20 new affordable rentals for low- and

“Taking this on goes to the very heart of our values of serving the needs of our community.”

– Executive Director
Lisa Byers

very-low-income households, to be constructed by OPAL.

Funding for the Pea Patch purchase came from private donations to OPAL and the Community Foundation, along with a low-interest loan from the state Housing Finance Commission. Pre-development activities are being supported by donations and grants, including one from San Juan County.

Next Steps: Governing Documents, a Steering Committee and an Open, Inclusive Design Process

The next critical steps will involve drafting governing documents and establishing a steering committee. Then, meetings will be held with neighbors, community leaders, and islanders who have experienced housing instability to gather input and begin the design process. OPAL’s goal is to start housing construction in 2025.

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no plans to return to Bali and is determined to work hard to become an OPAL homeowner.

Suriadi is excited about the upcoming holiday season, where she plans to decorate a Christmas tree in her front entrance for neighborhood children and to host an open house for her neighbors.

'I Love My Purple Door – Never Had One Before!'

Northern Heights resident Carol Gehlner is another Orcasonian with an amazing backstory revealing her versatile energy – a career ranging from teaching and coordinating education on military bases, to work



Carol's purple door symbolizes the comfort and security found beyond its threshold.

for a UN affiliate, management of a chain of gift stores, radiology sales, condominium management and general contracting.

"Plus, crewing and scheduling for a commercial yacht. I have had 55 years to do all of this and might be leaving something out," Carol adds.

She says the contractor for the Northern Heights renovation, Dennison Construction, was wonderful, tidy, and efficient every day, and went beyond to help her move back into her renovated apartment.

They completed her new kitchen around the microwave oven which she had previously installed. And then there's her walk-in shower! New flooring and bright new exterior paint.

Living on Orcas, Carol says, "you just kind of have to accept what you get."

She was looking for other housing before the OPAL project, with no affordable options to be found online. But with Northern Heights' purchase, OPAL did an excellent job of "keeping the spirit alive" throughout renovation of the 12 apartments. Tenants stayed in already-completed units while their apartments were rejuvenated. Now these homes are upgraded for sustainability, with such things as heat pumps, new windows and added insulation throughout. And hers is permanently affordable for her, enabling her to stay on Orcas.

“ Working with OPAL, you get the feeling that people really care about you.”

– Carol Gehlner

Working with Carol and her neighbors, OPAL gets reminded daily about the difference we can make for our Orcas community.

Kidder Way Update:

10 New Homes Are on the Way – Hurray!

After two years of planning, designing, and fundraising, construction of this small neighborhood of townhomes off Mt. Baker Road will begin early next year. "We're deeply grateful to everyone who has contributed to make this possible – the state Housing Trust Fund, the county Home Fund, and the more than 100 individual donors who have given so generously," expressed Lisa Byers, OPAL executive director.

This fall, while land-use and building permits are being reviewed, the contractor bidding process is underway and one final grant application has been submitted to top up funding for what is OPAL's first new construction

of ownership homes in 10 years. With 40 pre-approved applicants waiting to buy an OPAL home, OPAL is innovating again with this new housing cluster. The development comprises five duplex-style two-story buildings. The mix will include five one-bedroom residences with lofts and five two-bedroom homes. Because of the duplex structures, this is OPAL's first condominium project.

"We've taken advantage of everything we learned in building April's Grove to make each home attractive, comfortable, healthy, and efficient," explained Byers. Completion is anticipated by early 2025.



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Your support can provide affordable homes and foster a healthy community.
Take action today!

Civics Class Bench: A Very Special Senior Project

Maddox Davis's senior project in his 2023 Civics class, taught by Phil Comito, was something he wanted to be special. As he began research to build the bench for an Eastsound park, he recalled an empty space at April's Grove in the landscape designed by Robin Kuklick.

Prior to settling on his final design, Maddox explored many styles and designs of benches. He eventually chose a live edge board of maple and another of cedar. He wanted a black metal frame for the bench. His grandpa, Ron Griffin, helped him throughout the entire process.

The two of them sorted through Ron's collection of wood, recycled steel, and much more at Ron's landscaping business. Amid their search, they discovered some leftover Epa wood, which they decided would make perfect arms for the bench. Erin estimates it took 45 to 50 hours to build the bench after school and on weekends. And created a lifetime of memories.



Maddox's mother, Erin Davis, works at April's Grove. The bench, just outside her office window, gives her a view of a continuous stream of people who come to enjoy the new bench and its space. Maddox is a sixth generation islander.

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