



FALL 2013

## OPAL NEWSLETTER

HOUSING ISLAND PEOPLE, HELPING TO MAINTAIN ISLAND CHARACTER

### STEWARDSHIP OF THE BONNIE BRAE FOREST

The homes in OPAL's Bonnie Brae neighborhood are clustered on four acres of a 12-acre parcel. In 2001, two years after moving into their new homes, residents of the neighborhood formed a "Stewardship Committee" to care for their common land and the eight-acre forest surrounding their homes.

"Stewardship" is a term that means managing and caring for resources that are valuable to others. All of the land owned by OPAL – more than 50 acres at this point – provides a perpetual benefit for the island, and is also a perpetual responsibility for OPAL and the homeowners, who are the primary stewards.

Taking their responsibility to heart, Bonnie Brae's homeowners sought help from the professional staff of the San Juan Islands Conservation District to create a long-term management plan for the forest around their homes. The wooded area is crisscrossed with walking trails, and contains wetlands and a pond. It is also a wonderful "backyard" for the neighborhood's 16 school-age children.



*OPAL homeowner Austen Ater and his team at Eventide Arbor Care planted native species trees near Enchanted Forest Road as part of the Bonnie Brae stewardship project. The recent heavy rains tested the newly installed bio-swale – it was judged to have prevented much of the runoff damage that would have occurred in prior years.*

The residents desired a plan that would protect the watershed, ensure the health of the forest, create and maintain trails, produce valuable wildlife habitat, support diverse species, and reduce soil erosion and storm water runoff. It was important that these goals be achieved by utilizing "Best Management Practices," such as forest thinning, noxious weed control, reforestation with native species, and rain gardens.

Their effort resulted in a collaborative project funded through a multi-agency grant that was administered by the Conservation District. The residents readily agreed to volunteer nearly 400 hours as a match for the grant. Those hours were spent planning and documenting, mapping the forest and wetlands, flagging, pulling noxious weeds,

*Continued next page*

## IS A COMMUNITY LOAN FUND PART OF OPAL'S FUTURE?

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Earlier this year I missed being elected to the San Juan County Council by about 100 votes. I found running for election was like taking a long trip to a far-a-way land. It's exciting. You meet great people. You experience things that you could not otherwise imagine. Yet you have some hard days. You eat some bad food. Some people behave in a gruff and ugly way. You feel unanchored. And then, you get to come home. You're glad you went, but my goodness, is it ever good to be back!



That's how I feel about being back full-time at OPAL. The campaign was like a sabbatical. Upon my return I am more energized and ready to take on fresh challenges. Not only is OPAL continuing to move houses in order to provide new permanently affordable homes for the island, and facilitating the resale of houses so that they remain affordable from one owner to the next, and supporting our homeowners and neighborhoods, and managing our 29 rental apartments, but the OPAL board is also looking ahead to serving the community in fresh ways.

**One idea is to create a community loan fund.** While on the campaign trail, I heard repeatedly that people's lack of access to loans for a range of purposes was impeding their ability to live in the islands. For those who moved here in the 1960s to 1980s, it was possible to cobble together savings, buy a piece of land, and borrow money to build a house. Today, however, banks rarely, if ever, make loans on raw land. That affordable option of the past is no longer available. For those who continue to live on minimal income, it can also be hard to obtain a loan to make home repairs.

Over the coming months, OPAL will be looking at ways to provide more accessible financing for qualified borrowers. Our exploration will start by examining ways to support our existing homeowners with home repairs, or to expand the options for OPAL homebuyers to obtain mortgage financing.

*Stay tuned for updates. If you want to be part of the conversation, please contact me at 376-3191 or [opalclt@opalclt.org](mailto:opalclt@opalclt.org).*

*Lisa Byars*  
Executive Director

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## STEWARDSHIP AT BONNIE BRAE Continued from page 1

hauling debris, installing a rain garden, planting, mulching, and watering. Residents of all 24 homes volunteered time and energy to the best of their ability, and were involved with the myriad of decisions along the way. Jeanne Beck, OPAL's Stewardship and Project Manager, provided support and guidance. The work was completed in the spring of 2013, after almost two years, and an on-going maintenance plan is in place.

## MEET THE PROUD OWNERS OF OPAL'S FIFTH RECYCLED HOUSE

Among the newest owners of an OPAL house are **Grace McCune** and **Greg Ripley**. Vivacious and warm, Grace is familiar to many Orcas Islanders as a singer, songwriter, actor, music teacher, and conductor of the Musical Theater Youth Troupe and the Rock on the Rock Singers. Equally as friendly and engaging, Greg is self-employed as a plumber. They met at a dance at the Odd Fellows Hall in 2006.



*Greg Ripley and Grace McCune walked alongside their new OPAL house as it was moved from Buck Mountain. They are pictured below with members of the Nickel Bros. team who relocated the house to Mountain View Street.*



Late in 2012, after renting a residence near the ferry landing for several years, they began thinking about buying a home. “We looked at houses available on the open market, but were disappointed by what we could afford,” explained Greg. “I was taking a class with Jeanne Beck, and she mentioned to me that OPAL was going to move a donated home off Buck Mountain soon. We took a look at it and loved it. So we put in an application.”

After completing the OPAL application process, Greg and Grace waited 10 weeks for mortgage loan approval. “That was a nerve-wracking time! But everyone at OPAL was so helpful and encouraging and professional, which made it a little easier,” said Grace. The day the house was moved, Grace, Greg, and several OPAL staff members walked down the mountain with the building and accompanied it to its new location on Mountain View Street, west of the airport. “It felt like a parade!” exclaimed Grace.

Grace and Greg moved into their new home in late summer. Being homeowners in Eastsound has brought many changes for them. “Owning our own home gives us more stability and more certainty about our lives. I can focus more fully on growing my business,” said Greg.

“It’s so much easier for me to work with my students and choirs now that I’m living in town,” Grace added. “And this neighborhood has been very friendly. We just couldn’t be happier about it all!”

### Because of your support and OPAL’s efforts, more young families can afford to make their home on Orcas:

Median age  
of Orcas  
Islanders:

**55.3**  
years

Median age  
of residents of  
Washington  
State:

**37.3**  
years

Median age  
of residents in  
OPAL homes:

**31.1**  
years



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**THANK YOU TO OUR GALA 2013 SPONSORS:**  
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*Sara Jane Johnson, left, and Frank and Jan Loudin were feted as OPAL's newest Lifetime Members during this year's Gala. The award is given to those who have made sustained donations of time, talent or treasure to help anchor OPAL's success in meeting the need for affordable housing on Orcas Island.*



This recycled house is the first of four that will eventually be moved to OPAL property on Seaview Street. OPAL staff continue to search for additional houses to complete this new mini neighborhood. A grant from the Washington State Housing Trust Fund was instrumental in acquiring the land. Additional donations are needed to fully pay for the cost of moving and renovating the structures and connecting the utilities, according to Lisa Byers.

**In 2014 help us celebrate ...**

- OPAL's 25th anniversary!
- Our 100th permanently affordable house!

**Check out our "new & improved" website:**  
[www.opalclt.org](http://www.opalclt.org)