

FALL 2017



Excerpt from a Facebook post by Peter and Brigitte's daughter, Eva:

"Alexander and I were born and raised in this little home. When we were small, the brutal Seattle winters whipped through and we'd run around with pots and pans, gathering rain that slipped through the leaks in the roof. Over the years my parents made improvements (like a new roof). I'll never forget the first day they put down the hardwood floor, we had a rollerblading party with the record player spinning us into the night. Now ... if you've ever been over for dinner, you'll know we spent many a night sitting around our dining room table arguing politics and drinking bottles of wine. Most of those nights ended in dance parties and butt wagging ... to the soundtracks [of the day]. **It was time for our little home to adopt a new family, may it bring them as much joy and laughter as it once gave us. She's a special one.**"

Our Newest House Has Led Many Lives:

UW Women's Canoe Boat House,
Beloved Family Houseboat,
Now Happily Settled on Firm Ground

It's a classic tale of imagination, generosity, perseverance and repurposing.

OPAL's 11th "recycled" house recently arrived at its final resting place - 54 Mountain View Street in Eastsound. The much-loved, formerly floating home was owned by Peter Erickson and Brigitte Bertschi of Seattle, who generously donated it to OPAL along with funding to help pay for the move.

According to its former owners, it was originally the floating University of Washington Women's Canoe Boat House. In the mid 50s, it was purchased and converted into a personal houseboat on Portage Bay. When the I-5 bridge was built, it was moved to Eastlake where it became home to Peter and Brigitte, who raised their two (now grown) children there.

OPAL's biggest challenge in moving the three-bedroom houseboat to Orcas and dry land? Removing the collection

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“It’s Like We All Have to Hold Hands to be Successful in Helping People.” – Elaine Shiozawa, OPAL office manager

Sometimes OPAL tenants need help that goes beyond a stable, affordable place to live. That’s when OPAL staff finds itself reaching out to other island organizations.

“A few months ago I noticed one of our longtime renters was confused and acting differently,” explained Elaine Shiozawa, OPAL office manager, who oversees the Reddick Apartments. “I was worried and called the Orcas Community Resource Center.”



Elaine Shiozawa with Erin O’Dell, executive director of the Orcas Community Resource Center, outside the OPAL offices. Elaine, who manages the Reddick Apartments, often works with Erin and OCRC when tenants have special needs.

That call launched a wellness visit by paramedics, a doctor’s exam and a medical flight off island. A serious medical issue was confirmed. Following surgery in Seattle, the tenant returned home, but continued to decline.

Meanwhile Erin O’Dell, executive director of the Orcas Community Resource Center (OCRC), assembled a team that worked together to put a safety plan in place. Eventually the tenant entered hospice care at an assisted living facility on the mainland. A close friend got in touch with his family, who came to visit him before he died.

“Yes, I was his landlady,” said Elaine, “but it’s not just a matter of collecting rent. I was concerned about his safety and I wanted to honor his wishes.”

Fortunately the Orcas community has a solid set of resources that OPAL staff can call on when there’s a special need. In addition to OCRC, OPAL residents benefit from services offered by the Senior Center, Food Bank, churches, medical providers, Orcas Fire and Rescue, and the sheriff’s office.

Jeremy King, property manager for Ad-West Realty Services, oversees OPAL’s 22 affordable apartments

at Lavender Hollow. Eighteen of the units receive rental assistance through USDA or HUD. There are currently 21 islanders on the waitlist for the 22 apartments.

“I’ve managed this property for seven years,” said Jeremy. “I know what resources are available and how things work; I know the people and can make referrals. When a tenant asks, I can help.”

Jeremy works closely with OPAL and OCRC in meeting

housing needs. “These apartments are a stepping stone for people who want to live here, work, raise their families and be successful,” said Jeremy. Several tenants have eventually gone on to buy OPAL homes.

Erin echoed how the two organizations work together. “We help clients apply for both Reddick and Lavender Hollow apartments. We’re so grateful to OPAL because housing is such a critical need for people.”

OCRC also provides rental and energy assistance, and everything from ferry tickets for medical appointments to parenting help and even shoes for kids.

Recently Jeremy and Erin and island social worker Larry Hughes were successful in helping an islander who had been on the Lavender Hollow waitlist move into a unit that became available. This person had been homeless for six years. OCRC will provide ongoing case management, meeting with the new tenant once a week.

“People sometimes have needs that go beyond shelter alone,” Elaine summed it up. “That’s when OPAL needs help from other organizations in our community.”

OPAL Helps Its Homeowners Join the Fiber Revolution!

Homeowners living in OPAL neighborhoods, OPAL and Rock Island Communications are partnering to bring fiber optic internet connections to OPAL homeowners in Eastsound. Nearly 80 percent of OPAL households in the target neighborhoods: Oberon Lane, Wild Rose Meadow, Opal Commons, Bonnie Brae and Madrona Street, have signed agreements to hook up under the new program. Construction began in late October and will be completed in early 2018.

The project grew from three areas of strength:

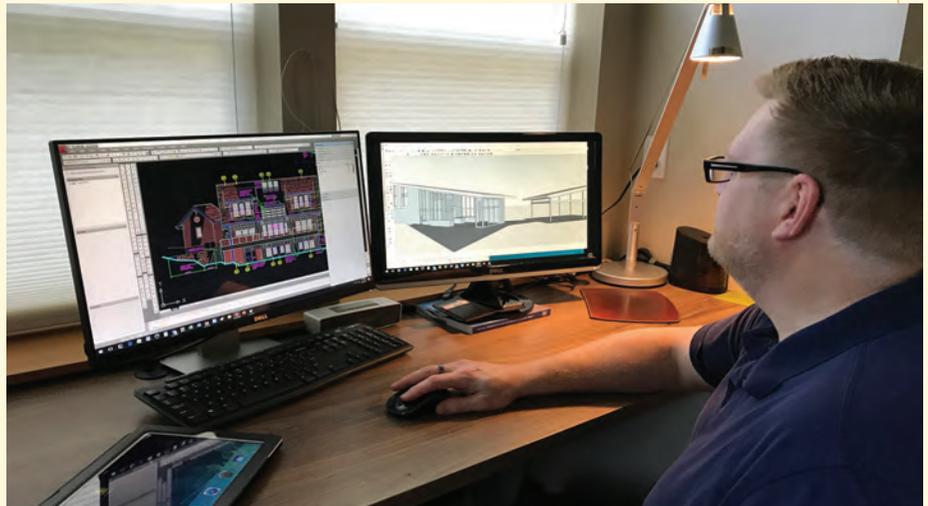
1. **The leadership of six OPAL homeowners** who organized their neighbors, going door to door to discuss the project details, benefits and costs. Their dedication of time, education and neighbor-to-neighbor dialogue is what gave each neighborhood such high participation.
2. **The commitment of the OPAL board of trustees** to make this essential new infrastructure available to CLT homeowners by adopting a loan program that assured Rock Island could install cable to every house in a neighborhood.
3. **Rock Island's support** for the project, which includes the \$1,500 incentive offered to any San Juan County resident who connects now, and a committed team who helped work out the loan program design.

“Most of us haven’t ever had adequate internet access in the islands,” said long-time Opal Commons homeowner and current OPAL board member Ian Van Gelder, who canvassed his neighborhood for the project. “Fiber is exactly what we need to give everyone a leg up in the modern world and is extremely important to our economic futures. It’s a great equalizer, and it’s a necessary utility – like water, power and sewer service.”

Gerry Lawlor of Rock Island was thrilled when OPAL executive director Lisa Byers approached him with this vision. “Lisa and the OPAL trustees put a lot of thought into a structure that would work. This project helps us to meet our goals for delivering access to internet services to everyone in the community – not just those who can afford to build out individually.”

Not everyone in OPAL neighborhoods shares the same need for internet services, and those who don’t want to connect now don’t have to.

“I depend on good internet service to work from home,” said Kurt Hunt, Wild Rose Meadow homeowner and canvasser for fiber. As a designer of homes, Hunt works regularly with clients all over the world, communicating on Skype and sending large files back and forth. “Everything I do is internet based.”



Fast, reliable internet service is essential to Kurt Hunt, who works from his home in Wild Rose Meadow. Kurt, a graduate architect, serves on OPAL's board of trustees and building committee.

Van Gelder echoes this sentiment. “Everything our daughter does for school depends on a good internet connection: homework, grades, communication with teachers and peers. Her online French class is great – except when everyone in the neighborhood is streaming movies and the connection degrades. With fiber, we can all use as much as we need – and there’s enough capacity to take us well into the future.”



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When OPAL's newest "recycled" house came ashore on North Beach, it was welcomed to the island by a serendipitous fly-over.



Our Newest House Has Led Many Lives

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of logs underneath. Jeanne Beck, OPAL project manager, worked with Nickel Bros., house movers, to have the houseboat towed to a dry dock where it was hauled out, the logs removed and steel beams installed. Then the houseboat was barged to Orcas and trucked to the site. Next steps: adding a foundation and making some needed repairs. Work is underway now.

Peter and Brigitte recently toured their old home and OPAL's newest project: "It was fun to see the houseboat on land and so interesting to hear the story. I have to say how much we admire your persistence, patience and commitment to see the job done correctly in moving the houseboat and in building a new home for a family."

When renovations are done and new owners move in, it has been suggested that perhaps OPAL's 104th affordable house be celebrated with a bottle of something bubbly "cracked over its bow."

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