

You and OPAL: 30 Years on Orcas

Your belief in our mission and steadfast support of our work have bettered the lives of more than 200 island families and benefited the Orcas community in countless ways. Some longtime residents reflect on why it continues to matter.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of OPAL Community Land Trust and the 50th anniversary of the community land trust movement in the United States.



Emilie Gincig in front of the Funhouse Commons where she is the executive director

In 1989, OPAL became the first community land trust on the West Coast, born out of the need of islanders to have access to year-round housing they could afford.

Twenty years earlier, the first community land trust in the nation, New Communities, was born of the desire for black farmers to have access to land in Albany, Georgia. Leaders from civil rights, agriculture and social justice groups created an organization that held land in common to be leased for homes and farming. Their goal was to give land and wealth back to primarily black

farmers who had struggled to gain access to land for generations.

“OPAL offers people stability in order to serve the community at large. The stable home has to come first. I feel OPAL is such a great model for community participation. The structure of neighborhoods is to promote community living – to learn to be a part of a community.”

– Penny Sharp-Sky,
OPAL co-founder and homeowner

In celebration of these anniversaries we spoke with a few people, who, like you, have helped not only to create what OPAL is today, but also to build the Orcas community.

A central theme running through all of our discussions was how stable, affordable housing has allowed for lives to be lived on Orcas that would otherwise not have been possible.

Emilie Gincig, executive director of the Funhouse Commons, grew up in an OPAL

Continued on page 2

You and OPAL: 30 Years on Orcas

Continued from page 1

home and now rents an OPAL apartment. “I have lived in OPAL housing for the majority of my life. If my parents hadn’t been able to buy an OPAL house when I was six, there is a good chance we would not have been able to stay on Orcas. I am grateful to have had the privilege of growing up here and in an OPAL community.”

“From a very early age, I had many homes in my neighborhood where I felt safe and comfortable. There were other families with children my age as well as amazing adults who were my role models. My neighbors invested in who I was as a person, made me feel loved and helped me grow up with a strong foundation,” said Emilie. “OPAL neighborhoods strengthen our community and help individuals know and understand the needs of those close by. There are many people living in OPAL housing who contribute to the health of our community by being a part of our workforce. At this point in my life, if I didn’t have OPAL housing I would not be able to have my job at the Funhouse or be living comfortably on Orcas.”

“ I’m not sure we would have been able to stay on Orcas if not for our Bonnie Brae home, and I’m sure that’s true for many OPAL homeowners. Looking forward to another 20 years here, and knowing we have an affordable, sustainable home is key.”

*- Nikki Ames,
business owner and OPAL homeowner*

Penny Sharp-Sky, one of the founders of OPAL, agrees, “OPAL enabled my family to stay here. I am a potter and my husband, Michael, was a writer and OPAL allowed us to pursue those occupations. We wanted to adopt a child and we needed a stable place to live. Starting OPAL allowed for that. The intimacy and safety of a neighborhood was so important. Now, as an aging

person, I just don’t worry about not having connection with others or someone to help if I need it. That connection with fellow islanders on Orcas feels concentrated in OPAL neighborhoods.”



“One of my favorite times at Opal Commons was Easter morning. Everyone would color and decorate eggs in the days leading up to Easter. Neighbors would volunteer to hide the eggs at 5:00 in the morning for the kids. The succession of kids with big baskets helping the little ones

search for eggs. Parents chatting and drinking tea on porches watching the kids. These neighborhood events were always my favorite,” says Penny Sharp-Sky.

From our look back at the past three decades, several themes radiate through: community, stability, connection and diversity. OPAL residents are a mix of families, working people and retired folks, all building and contributing to the health and variety of the Orcas community. With stable and affordable housing, many have been able to start their own businesses, raise a family, and find and work their passion on Orcas Island.

In our 30th year, the OPAL team thanks you – our supporters, homeowners, renters – for all you have done for us and our island. We look forward to more years of community, connection and diversity on Orcas with you and future generations.

April's Grove is Under Construction!

It's a rainy afternoon, but because it's Tuesday – the day for weekly meetings with the general contractor and architect for April's Grove – Jeanne Beck, OPAL's project manager, pulls on her mud boots and raincoat and heads to the project site to check on progress. Work crews on the site are buzzing with activity.

On the south end, in the pasture where April-the-cow resided, Island Excavating is welding together storm-water storage pipes and burying pipes placed in the ground weeks before. The network of pipes can store 226,284 gallons of rainwater runoff from roads, parking areas and buildings; then slowly release the stored water and prevent flooding.

To the north, behind a cluster of protected fir and madrona trees, four buildings are in various stages of construction. Orcas Electric is running wires into the first two buildings. Roofers are installing

shingles on the third building, and drywall is going up in the fourth building. The nine remaining concrete slabs are in place and ready for framing to begin soon.

At this point, near the end of October, the 45-townhome project is about 40 percent complete. The general contractor, Dawson Construction, estimates the buildings will be ready to occupy by early fall 2020. The project has been funded by individuals, along with federal, state and local government agencies that each have requirements about who will live there. As a result, April's Grove will be a place of broad diversity, providing housing for people with low to moderate incomes including people with disabilities, those who are homeless, seniors and families with children.

The formal application process for April's Grove will start in the first part of 2020, but prior to that



Lisa Byers, OPAL's executive director, shows her granddaughter, Alice, the April's Grove site. Alice didn't want to wear a hard hat so they made sure to keep their distance!

time, OPAL is keeping a record of those who wish to be notified about progress and timelines. Folks who are interested are encouraged to call the OPAL office or send an inquiry through the "Rent a Home" section of OPAL's website at www.opalclt.org.

Your Legacy Makes Our Work Together Possible

When you make a legacy gift to OPAL, you are making a promise to the future. Bob Henigson understood that. His vision for the future of Orcas was a healthier, more inclusive society. A longtime supporter of OPAL, he grasped the key role that safe and affordable housing plays in promoting that vision.

When he wrote his will, Bob included a generous gift to OPAL. OPAL received Bob's gift in 2015 and invested it until the time when it could make a significant difference in bringing an affordable housing project to Orcas. That

time arrived this spring when OPAL's trustees voted to use the Henigson bequest to close the gap on funding the construction of 45 affordable rental townhomes in the April's Grove project.

You too can make a promise to the future by including a gift to OPAL in your will. **For more information on how to make your gift, visit the OPAL website at www.opalclt.org or contact the OPAL office at 360-376-3191.**





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P.O. Box 1133
Eastsound, WA 98245
opalclt@opalclt.org • www.opalclt.org

IN THIS ISSUE

Writing/Editing: Vicki Brems, Julie Brunner, Lisa Byers,
Crystal Mossman, Pegi Groundwater, Judy Whiting.
Images: Lisa Byers, Crystal Mossman, Penny Sharp-Sky
Layout and Design: Mary Ann Sircely

Thank you for your support in 2019!

Island Loan Fund Continues to Bridge the Gap

In its first year, the Island Loan Fund has received 16 inquiries and made three loans, with two more loans in process. The Island Loan Fund provides financing for people on Orcas who are creditworthy, but who are unable to access traditional credit. The money to make loans comes from islanders who wish to invest locally and agree to a modest fixed-rate return on their investment.

The original goal was to help islanders purchase existing houses, but by the time the Island Loan Fund was launched, the real estate market had rebounded from the



Recent applications to the Island Loan Fund are for non-traditional homes, like tiny houses.

recession, and houses listed for sale were no longer affordable for households with moderate to middle incomes. Instead, people looking for financing were primarily seeking construction loans. As a result, the first three loans have been construction related.

Recently we are seeing an increase in applicants who want to finance non-traditional homes, such as tiny houses. A conventional financial institution considers these to be loans for raw land, which carry higher interest rates. Our next two prospective loans fit into this category.

Funds for loans made through the Island Loan Fund come from local investors seeking a social impact investment. **To find out more about borrowing, contact Julie Brunner, residents@opalclt.org. To invest, contact Lisa Byers, opalclt@opalclt.org.**

Visit us online at www.opalclt.org