

A New Chapter at Mount Baker Apartments

The Garcia Salinas family has found a fresh start in their renovated Mount Baker apartment. The family of four includes Verence Salinas Ramirez, who works at Orcas Food Co-op, and Edson Garcia Guzman, who started his own construction business (Black Rooster), after learning the trade on the island. They are parents to Denilson and Alison Garcia Salinas, who enjoy their quality education at Orcas Island Public Schools.

The journey to this bright, airy home began years ago when the Garcia Salinas family arrived on Orcas, taking their first steps in a modest unit at the Mount Baker Apartments. Life, with its unpredictable rhythms, moved them across the island, changing houses, expanding their family with the addition of their daughter, and yet, fate brought them full circle back to where they began. The family's previous rental home in the North Beach area was sold, prompting their move.

"I remember walking in for the first time after OPAL had finished their work," Verence recalls, her voice tinged with amazement. "The sunlight was pouring in, and it felt like we were in a completely new world. It was our old home, but with a brand-new heart."

“ It’s our home. I’ve finished it with my own two hands to make sure my family has everything they need.”

– Edson Garcia



Building dreams together: The Garcia Salinas family finds happiness and togetherness on their deck.

The once-quiet but tired apartment has been refreshed into bright, airy spaces.

Edson's personal journey from novice to craftsman is embodied in the walls of their apartment. Collaborating with OPAL, he painted the walls, and his attention to detail ensured that every corner met his family's needs. "It's our home. I've finished it with my own two hands to make sure my family has everything they need," says Edson.

The family now revels in the newfound privacy and comfort of their individual rooms, with their son, Deni, expressing his joy at having his own space with a closet. The heart of the home, the kitchen, where Verence loves to cook, was transformed. The new design, with

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Pea Patch Campus Design Kicks Off

On the first weekend of April, islanders gathered in groups to brainstorm ideas for a new campus on the Pea Patch Lane campus, contributing wonderful ideas, including, and not limited to:

- Locating buildings, with residential privacy and easy access to the Food Bank and Resource Center.
- Reducing the impact of cars and the Food Bank's delivery truck.
- Improved parking for the

- Funhouse and Children's House.
- A playground, pocket gardens and landscape buffers for neighboring properties.
- Focus on solar collection and the potential for a community microgrid.
- Connecting all new and existing structures with accessible pathways.
- Enhancing the wetland buffer's biodiversity with native plants and relocating the public path eastward, away from the western wetland.



Islanders engage in a collaborative design process at the Pea Patch workshops, sharing visions for sustainable and inclusive campus development.

The workshops were facilitated by a team from Environmental Works, the architects who will design this campus on behalf of the three collaborating organizations. The first workshop was with partners, such as the Health Care District, San Juan County, the Community Foundation, the Library, Island Rides and SAFE San Juans. The second workshop was with representatives from the abutting properties, and the third was with people who have used the services of OPAL, the Food Bank and the Resource Center. Participants used cutouts to visualize the campus layout, which was then refined during a well-attended open house.

The architects are tasked with integrating this feedback into schematic alternatives. These will be reviewed by the steering committee and discussed with stakeholders. An open house in August aims to present the selected option, moving it towards the final design phase.

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its large sink, wood cabinets and modern appliances, is complemented by views out the window, making cooking a relaxing and enjoyable experience. The sense of community is deep, with their extended families living next door, fostering a feeling of belonging.

“It’s more than just living next door to each other; it’s about

being there for each other. That’s what family is about,”
Verenice reflects.

As they settle into their renewed home, Verenice looks forward to adding the final personal touches, such as hanging family photos that will tell the story of their journey. “We’re happy here, really happy,” sums up Verenice.

Helping Nature Take Back The Reddick Forest

OPAL has made significant headway in restoring the Reddick Forest near the Bonnie Brae neighborhood by removing invasive species and planting native vegetation with the expertise of ecologist Samantha Martin (Field & Fern) and former Land Bank land steward Eric Nelson (NW Habitat Management).

The project's initial phase concentrated on clearing non-native plants like Himalayan blackberry, English hawthorn, English ivy and clematis close to trails, enhancing accessibility and enjoyment for visitors.

The introduction of native plants, chosen for their adaptability to the forest's wet conditions and their ability to provide diverse food sources for wildlife, includes salmonberry, red alder and skunk cabbage. Recent plantings such as flowering red currant and paper birch will help determine which species best thrive in this environment, with plans to introduce more varieties like red cedar.

To ensure the invasive blackberries do not return, a precise "cut and dab" technique was employed, where stems are cut and immediately treated with a targeted herbicide. Similarly, large holly trees underwent stem injections for effective control. These measures are carefully executed to be seasonally appropriate and environmentally safe.

The eco-team also adopted natural restoration methods, like leaving plant material to decompose, which enriches future growth. In some areas, blackberry canes were repurposed as mulch to protect newly seeded native grasses and herbs.

OPAL's long-term vision for the Reddick Forest is to foster an ecosystem where native flora and fauna can thrive, supporting wildlife and contributing to a balanced deer population. The project also aims to enhance the variety of native berries for birds, particularly during migration periods. The forest's youthful alder-dominated landscape



Eric Nelson at work, clearing invasive species at the Reddick Forest.

offers a unique habitat conducive to this growth. Overall, OPAL's work exemplifies the power of community efforts and environmental stewardship in enacting positive ecological change.

Collaborating to Expand EV Access for OPAL Residents

OPAL is partnering with Island Rides and OPALCO to improve e-vehicle access for OPAL residents through a pilot EV car-sharing program. This initiative addresses the dual challenges of limited public transportation and high gas prices, which particularly impact low-income residents of San Juan County, where 78% of carbon emissions come from vehicles. Island Rides, also known as San Juan Islands Shuttle System, offers free rides with volunteer drivers and three EVs. Supported by a WSDOT grant, the "Island Rides and OPAL Green Carshare"

project will extend EV access, including installing charging stations at OPAL offices and April's Grove for two Chevy Bolt cars managed by Island Rides. OPAL community members, who are licensed and insurable, will run the program and be trained in reservations and EV usage. Additionally, OPAL and OPALCO are cooperating on a grant to add 10 more EV charging stations, bolstering Orcas Island's infrastructure. These actions support OPAL's mission to facilitate affordable, environmentally friendly transportation for its residents.



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Every Home Has a Story: Your Support Changes Lives

Save the Date: Join us for OPAL's 2024 Annual Meeting

**Thursday, May 16, 2024
4:30 pm at Orcas Center**

This year's meeting will showcase exciting developments, including:

- Designs for Kidder Way ownership homes,
- Design concepts for the Pea Patch collaborative campus,
- Update on OPAL's activities from Executive Director Lisa Byers,
- Election of new trustees,
- Light refreshments and gathering with neighbors who are helping to make affordable housing possible on Orcas Island.

Your presence and support are vital as we continue our mission to create a more sustainable and inclusive community.

We look forward to seeing you there!



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