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*Vero Beach beekeepers and their partners
at the Indian River Land Trust are as
busy as their beloved honey bees*

Bee Mine



40 Years of Caring

THE JOHN'S ISLAND COMMUNITY SERVICE LEAGUE
PASSES A MILLION-DOLLAR MILESTONE IN GIVING

BY AMY ROBINSON



Joan Woodhouse and Mary Ellen Keating accept an award from the School District of Indian River County in 1994.

In 1980, in a new, oak-canopied enclave known as John's Island, Johnny Van Name brought 60 women together for the greater good. "We had the drive, but without the internet, everything was done by hand," recalls Joan Woodhouse, an early member of the John's Island Community Service League. "Most of us had been volunteers elsewhere and were now looking to do something worthwhile. It was a natural segue." She recalls that the development was small then, even quaint. "We had elegant fashion shows where everyone dressed up. Martha Lincoln modeled at our first show," she says. "Most of our money for charitable giving came from home tours followed by a fancy high tea. We were



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Pat Thompson, former president of JICSL and current chair of the 40th anniversary gala fundraiser, and Faye Jennings attend a new member tea in 2016.



In 1996, JICSL reached \$110,000 in giving to seven local agencies, raising funds mostly through fashion shows and home tours.

more formal then.”

As the neighborhood grew, so did membership, and so did the need in the larger community. Times may have changed, but the desire of members to have a positive impact has only intensified. “By the mid-1990s we got up to \$100,000 in giving. We thought that was really something.” By 2015, the league had reached \$10 million in cumulative giving, and in 2019, the league’s 40th year, it gave more than \$1.03 million to a well-vetted group of recipient agencies.

Hope Woodhouse, Joan’s daugh-

Director of Federal Programs
for the School District of
Indian River County
Karen Malits and teacher Lisa
DeCosa lead kids in a STEP
Into Kindergarten program
to learn colors and letters.





The Bunny Hop Easter Run sponsored by John's Island Real Estate raises funds for the John's Island Community Service League.

ter and the current JICSL president, wants people to think big. “We got to this level of giving through innovation, collaboration and partnerships. We are not just tossing out money, we are being strategic,” she says. “Our members are generous; the money is available for giving, but people want to give to something really good that will move the needle.”

One example is the Alternative to Out of School Suspension program (ALTOSS), a free all-day program run by Tykes and Teens at the Gifford Youth Achievement Center. ALTOSS tutors middle and high school students while they are suspended and helps them develop the skills to cope with their individual challenges. Opportunities for community service are offered and encouraged. The program gets results: 70% of these students do not incur repeat suspensions.

Among the challenges that nonprofits face, asking for funds looms large. “These groups spend so much of their time applying for grants and they hear a lot of no’ answers, especially for new ideas,” Hope Woodhouse reports. Typically, organizations apply for funds







A team visits an established maternal care home in Orlando to study best practices. Meredith Egan, Julianne Price, Janay Brown, Jennie Joseph, Hannah Kite, Kristin Crocker and Andrea Berry

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Forty-four agencies requested funds from the John's Island Community Service League for 2020 for certain targeted programs. The money comes from either the 47-member Main Grants Committee, the 13-member Strategic Grants Committee or the three-member Scholarship Committee. "Fourteen teams of four or more volunteers embark on a process of due diligence," explains Grants Committee co-Chair Sarah Jane Moore. "They read applications and all supporting documentation, and a six-member team conducts a financial review to take a closer look at audits, budgets, board minutes and spending. Volunteers visit each agency and present their findings to the advisory group in March, where decisions are made collectively."

annually, and if an initiative is to start mid-year, they must wait until the following year to apply. Marlynn Scully, president of the league from 2012 to 2015, decided to remove that roadblock and issued a \$100,000 annual grant for five years to form the Strategic Grants Committee. Scully recalls her motivation. "I

wanted to allow the JICSL to have the flexibility to fund new ideas and collaborations. I hoped the money would encourage people to think big and look beyond one year."

Her generosity inspired creative thinking among the volunteers. "Things really took off during Marlynn's tenure," says Woodhouse.

"She encouraged those of us with experience with philanthropy to run with our ideas." Typically the Strategic Grants Committee awards funds for new initiatives and then will potentially fund the established program through regular grants. Woodhouse outlines how this is applied: "We tell the executive



2019 GIVING HIGHLIGHTS

ADULT SENIOR CARE

- Alzheimer & Parkinson Association
- Senior Resource Association and Public Guardianship Program

ADULT EDUCATION

- Literary Services
- United Against Poverty STEP

HOMELESS SERVICES AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Hope for Families Center
- Safe Space
- Samaritan Center

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Life Builders of the Treasure Coast's programs to help rehabilitate people in the criminal justice system

COUNSELING

- Suncoast Mental Health Center's care and case management for indigent children
- Gifford Youth Achievement Center Tykes and Teens

NURTURING CHILDREN

- Healthy Start Coalition's Doula Program
- Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative

ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS

- Educational scholarships for John's Island employees and their children
- Take Stock in Children's high school student mentoring program

“In Fellsmere and Gifford, the Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative is already helping families with developmental screenings through home visits. It’s all about building trust.”

– HOPE WOODHOUSE

directors of these nonprofits that we have funds, and to think broadly and come to us with requests.”

Woodhouse met recently with Barbara Hammond from The Learning Alliance, Andrea Berry at Healthy Start and Nivea Torres of the Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative to talk about assessing learning abilities for children well before kindergarten. “We are missing kids between birth and age 4, and we have known this for a while,” Woodhouse says. “If they have any learning disabilities, this is not caught until 4 years of age. What Healthy Start wants to do is go into homes and do developmental screenings and teach parents how to assess where their child’s development is relative to their age.”

These initiatives don’t happen

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JICSL Grants Committee co-Chairs Sarah Jane Moore and Lynne Whipple collaborate.



Hope Woodhouse, current JICSL president, and Marlynn Scully, former president of the league, flank Brooke Flood, school readiness coordinator for Indian River County.

overnight. Obstacles must be identified and overcome. Currently, pediatricians are not normally compensated for in-office developmental screenings, so JICSL and potential partners are looking to create a pool of money to pay for these screenings, get the data into a confidential database and refer these children to specialists when necessary. “In Fellsmere and Gifford, the Kindergarten Readiness Collaborative is already helping families with developmental screenings through home visits. It’s all about building trust.”

One of the hallmarks of the JICSL’s success is securing key partnerships. Among those, the United Way provides immeasurable support. “We could not do what we do without their help,” says Hope Woodhouse. Through a coordination with JICSL, the United Way of Indian River County (UWIRC) made E-Impact available, an online grant-making software that helps streamline the way local community partners apply for funding. The UWIRC also coordinates the Funders Forum, which began in 2010 at the behest of Marlynn Scully, who observed different funding groups having the same conversations separately. “The Indian River County Funders Forum is an informal association of local grant makers – private and community foundations – who seek to strengthen their knowledge of and connection with local nonprofit issues and community needs in order to maximize their charitable giving,” notes Meredith Egan, chief operating officer of the UWIRC. “The forum encourages participants to share knowledge, promote effective philanthropy and encourage collective action.”

The Funders Forum was instru-



A successful lobbying effort at a meeting of the Indian River Board of County Commissioners helped secure more funding for children's services.

mental in securing more money for children's services through a grass-roots effort. Woodhouse recalls how this came to be. "We asked the county to fulfill the commitment that was made in 1999 to give .125 mills of their tax roll revenue to area nonprofits that provide children's services, but that amount had not been reached. We lobbied the commissioners and they gave us a challenge grant: If we could raise \$200,000 they would match it. Members of the Funders Forum stepped up with the money in just one month and we got our matching funds."

The increase was appreciated, but the goal was to keep the upward momentum going and get the full

tax millage, a percentage of every \$1,000 of a property's assessed value that was originally promised. "Two years later we showed the county a comparison of how much money went to improve the gun range and to issue pet licenses as compared to funds allocated to children. We also compared what Indian River County gave to kids with Martin and St. Lucie counties. At this meeting we got them to commit to the original percentage of the tax roll, which now amounts to more than \$2 million."

Education funding has been an important focus of the JICSL for many years, both through the academic scholarship program Take Stock in Children at Indian River

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– LYNNE WHIPPLE

State College and programs closer to home. Karen Drury is chair of the JICSL's Scholarship Committee. “Until last year, we gave scholarship funds to the children of John's Island employees. While that program is very successful, we felt we could do better.” A brand-new initiative invites adult employees of John's Island to pursue their dreams. “At our first meeting last May, we had 36 interested full-time employees, of whom 11 applied immediately and were accepted into the program,” Drury says. “Some enrolled in summer school right away, the others began this fall. Collectively they are seeking certificates, two-year associate or four-year bachelor's degrees in biology, nursing, business administration, the culinary arts, landscaping and horticulture, and paramedic training.” The Scholarship Committee receives support and guidance from the scholarship program at IRSC and the Indian River Scholarship Fund.

Since the JICSL's beginnings, the volunteers who staff committees, raise funds, secure sponsors and research the most meaningful outlets for giving have tirelessly applied their own skills to the tasks at hand. “When I first moved here, I had just retired,” says Lynne Whipple, who currently serves as Grants Committee co-chair. “I had my fun at sports and social events and wanted to give back. I met such dedicated and like-minded people who do this work, not for recognition or acclaim, but because we see the disparity between what we have and the needs in the larger community.”

Membership in the JICSL has swelled to more than 1,000, with 200 joining in just the last three years. Betsy Fox is membership chair. “We have new members who have come from a variety of different disciplines, including development, corporate event planning, finance, marketing, design ... you name it and we have someone who knows how to do it and will do it,” she says.

“Our long-term valued members keep us afloat with their loyalty and giving year after year. We depend on them.”

One theme comes up repeatedly when talking with JICSL members: the lasting friendships they have made. In just two years as a member, Sallyan Pelletier has embraced the spirit of volunteerism and secured substantial increases in sponsorship money for events. “This is only my third year living here. Hope steered me to the league and I was able to meet people instantly and make close friends through volunteering. I had lots of choices about where to apply my efforts, and that work has made me feel closer to my community outside of John's Island.”

Fox has high hopes for increasing JICSL membership roles. “We have more than 1,000 members now, which includes 270 men. I'd like to see more men taking an active role and have a plan for that,” she says. “‘Two thousand members’ certainly has a nice ring to it.” ☘