

#### **PEOPLE**

# John's Island Service League raises the philanthropic bar



BY MARY SCHENKEL
Staff Writer

Under normal circumstances, the John's Island Community Service League has supported its charitable endeavors primarily through fundraising events and revenue from the Tambourine Shop. But as everyone knows, this past year has been anything but normal.

Curtailing their funding of local charities was never an option for this philanthropic group, who despite the forced cancellation of their 40th Anniversary Gala last March, dispersed a then all-time high of more than \$1.2 million in 2020, which included grants to charitable agencies, to the United Way COVID-19 Fund, and to scholarships to John's Island employees and their children.

Through sheer determination and the generosity of residents and sponsors, the JICSL this fiscal year (May 1, 2020 to April 30, 2021) has surpassed even that amount, distributing more than \$1.5 million back into the community.

Included in that \$1.5 million, grant co-chairs Lynne Whipple and Sarah Jane Moore allocated \$1.118 million



Sue Ann Siegelbaum and Sallyan Pelletier.

to 39 agencies and \$55,000 in scholarships for John's Island employees and their children.

COVID came to town just two months before Betsy Fox began her two-year term as JICSL president, and as the situation began to unfold, she says they recognized that food, rent and utility assistance would soon become a priority.

As a result, they issued a successful \$200,000 challenge grant to again sup-

port the United Way COVID-19 Fund (an initial \$50,000 had been granted in March).

Around the same time, Ellen Kendall and Michelle Julian pivoted their efforts from an Affordable Housing Task Force in partnership with the John's Island Foundation, to a collaborative HEART (Housing Emergency Advocacy Response Team) program. The JICSL is currently funding a dedicated legal aid attorney at Florida

Rural Legal Services to assist local residents faced with evictions and foreclosures.

"We had all hoped that the pandemic would be over by the fall and things would go back to normal for us and everyone else. We were wrong," says Fox, adding that the next hurdle was raising money without events.

"Our fundraising has always been event-driven, and events dropped from our calendar one by one. We were all wondering what we were going to do, and then Pat Thompson sprang into action and got it started," says Fox.

Mandated to shelter at home, Thomson kept herself busy by compiling a cookbook with help from family and friends. The resulting "Kitchen Captive" has already sold more than 1,000 copies.

"It is a compilation of about 100 recipes collected by Pat and contributed by members. Pat tested every single one and it's got a lot of her wonderful personality in it. It's really a huge success," says Fox. "She created the momentum of 'we can do this; we'll figure out another way.' It's ingenuity like Pat's that made us realize there is more than one way to do this."

#### **PEOPLE**

The book is available at Consider the Cook, off Ocean Drive, and Noteworthy in the Village Shops, with 100 percent of sales funneled back into JICSL.

They joined the virtual world with Tiffany and Co., perennially a major event sponsor, taking the raffle of a Tiffany T Square bracelet online. Additionally, JICSL opted to have an online auction of about a dozen must-have items.

"Our sponsors were more generous this season than ever before. They did get a lot of exposure, despite not having events, because we've done so much online. It's been great," says Fox.

"Our Spring Event co-chairs, Sallyan Pelletier and Sue Siegelbaum, had hoped to plan an outdoor concert, with concertgoers seated in pods of eight," says Fox, but they eventually realized it wouldn't be possible.

During a brainstorming session, Pelletier and Siegelbaum with Bo Forbes from Ironside Press devised the idea for their successful 'I'm in! 1,000 for \$1,000 Campaign.'

In addition to being an opportunity to engage a larger percentage of John's Island residents, they felt it would be an opportunity to educate residents as to where their generous donations go. "We knew that we wanted to highlight some of our agencies and the wonderful work they do in our community; what critical roles they play in helping our Indian River County neighbors."

Fox says Pelletier and Siegelbaum have been "prodigious workers" who treated the campaign like a gala, with eye-catching invitations and "I'm in" ballcaps delivered to donors, adding that they hit every one of their goals.

Starting in mid-January, they emailed weekly "Agency Spotlight" videos of some of the agencies that provide our community with muchneeded services, as well as some of the scholarship recipients. They also arranged to video some of the people who had made donations proclaiming, "I'm in!" – which were shown before and after each agency video.

"It really just made a wonderful impact to see all the people who participated," says Fox.

"One thing that was interesting as we watched the campaign unfold, is that as soon as we sent out one of these videos on a Monday morning, there was an almost immediate response with donations. These videos are incredibly meaningful and moving."

A Special Equestrians of the Treasure Coast video highlighted the child of a man who had done a lot of work on homes in the John's Island community.

"We realized this was impacting someone we know in our community.

I think that makes a difference," she explains. "The same thing happened when we highlighted our employees and their children who received scholarships. I think that encouraged people to give more."

Meanwhile, the Tambourine Shop had one of its most successful years, despite being closed last March and April. "Terry Osteen has been there practically every day; she's really put her heart and soul into it," says Fox. "A lot of people were home and so they were cleaning out closets, kitchens and donating things they weren't using any more."

The one event they did hold, an inaugural Masters Par 3 Family Golf Tournament, was a huge hit.

"Since we are an event-driven organization, we really wanted to have some kind of event and the only thing we knew we could do was a golf event. We had mechanisms in place to keep everyone safe," Fox explains. "Everyone really enjoyed themselves. We're 100 percent certain we'll do it again next year."

Fox is quick to give credit for the success of their endeavors to the hard work of the board members, committee chairs and all those whose less vis-

ible roles are equally important.

"One of the most rewarding moments I've had this season was when a new resident of John's Island stopped me and said the reason that she and her husband had contributed to the campaign was because they knew that the Service League would be good stewards of their donation," says Fox.

"And that's not something that happens overnight. It's because of the remarkable work of previous presidents and board members. I feel very fortunate to lead such an incredibly well-respected organization."

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