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Dr. Anthony and Eileen Furino.

**SERVICE LEAGUE'S SPIRIT,
GENEROSITY PROVE CONTAGIOUS**



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Service League's spirit, generosity prove contagious



Pat Thompson and Hope Woodhouse.

PHOTOS: DENISE RITCHIE



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Joanie Paulsen.

BY MARY SCHENKEL
Staff Writer

The Party That Was to Be:

The John's Island Community Service League has hosted some phenomenal fundraising galas over the years, but the 40th Anniversary Celebration scheduled for March 21, with its "You are the Champions" theme, was gearing up to be even more exceptional – until it too fell victim to the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter that Hope Woodhouse, JICSL president, and Pat Thompson, chair of the JICSL 40th Anniversary Celebration, sent to ticketholders and sponsors, they noted that in each of the past three years, the league distributed more than \$1 million in donations to local agencies and scholarships to John's Island employees and their children. About half was raised through galas.

The party was to have been held on the club's driving range, where a stage was to have been set up, with guests dining in a tent on a meal "fit for a Queen."

John's Island was one of the stops on a nationwide tour by the renowned Queen Tribute band Killer Queen, featuring Patrick Myers, who is said to be a dead ringer – visually and vocally – of the late, great Freddie Mercury.

"We canceled literally the day before I got the email from them saying that they were canceling their 15-city tour," said Thompson.

Queen's "We are the Champions" was at the height of popularity when the Service League was formed in 1980. A slight modification produced

the spot-on theme – "You are the Champions."

"I thought it was just a perfect theme for this year's celebration," said Thompson. "It's just a wonderful sentiment for everything that is done in this community. All the agencies, the people who support us, the sponsors, the residents, the volunteers – they are all the champions. It was a salute to everybody for 40 years of success stories."

More than 600 tickets had been sold, but Thompson says "the vast majority of our ticketholders have turned it into a contribution; it's a total tax donation for them now because there's no goods and services provided. It's just such a positive response. It's lifted our spirits for sure."

Additionally, she said, "we had more sponsors than ever before and they were very, very generous, recognizing that it was the 40th anniversary."

To get people in the mood, in January they had hosted a Film Festival showing of "Bohemian Rhapsody."

"Everyone at the club really embraced the mustaches and the Freddie outfits. We just had so much fun this year promoting it and getting everybody on board," said Thompson. "It was disappointing to cancel it, but as I've said to a lot of people, there's no self-pity when you've got a world crisis on your doorstep."

On what would have been event day morning, about 230 colorful gift bags that had been assembled by Eileen and Dr. Anthony Furino were driven by a small group of gloved volunteers to residents.

Decorated with red ribbons and

Union Jack flags – purchased as table decorations by Connie McGlynn and Sue Siegelbaum – the bags included such items as a Killer Queen Concert program, the coveted Little Black Book 2020, and a bottle of Chardonnay.

This year's Little Black Book directory of businesses and services was also filled with photos of John's Island supporters from 1980 to 2020. "I know people will love the trip down memory lane," said Thompson.

Additionally, Anne Warhover created a video montage of major sponsors photographed wearing Freddie Mercury mustaches, which will soon be broadcast to residents.

"Our sponsors missed a valuable opportunity to meet John's Islanders," said Thompson. "We want to make sure we celebrate their support as much as we can."

Later Saturday, Thompson was joined in her driveway by Woodhouse, gala treasurer Ashley Longwell, JICSL membership chair Betsy Fox, and Tiffany raffle chair Andrea Thibodeau, to draw the winning ticket for the diamond Tiffany Keys necklace donated by Tiffany & Co., Worth Avenue.

And at sunset, when the Killer Queen concert was scheduled to begin, they toasted each other from their own homes, safe in the knowledge that help is on the way from JICSL to agencies that need it the most.

The Purpose of the Party, Which Continues:

"Hope has been all over the community trying to figure out how we can help the agencies, and talking to the head of the John's Island board

to see how our employees have been affected and how we can help them," said Thompson. "She is the best."

Woodhouse, in turn, has nothing but praise for Thompson and JICSL members.

"The whole board and the extended team have been working flat out," said Woodhouse. "Our JICSL board and volunteers have gone beyond all year and especially now. This is really about relationships."

Commenting that the league brings together people of different backgrounds and interests, who develop friendships that they may not have otherwise made, she added, "You make really good friends in the Service League. When you work side-by-side with people in a shared mission, you get to know them better."

That mission is to provide grants for the operating expenses of charitable agencies involved with the health, education and human services issues that affect women, children and families in need. Categories include: Adult Health & Wellness, Children's and Youth Programs and Shelter.

Grant co-chairs Lynn Whipple and Sara Jane Moore led a committee of 60 volunteers, who extensively reviewed applications and made site visits before making the ultimate decision to fund 40 agencies, five of which were new this year.

JICSL dispersed an all-time high of \$1,215,700 this year, for a 40-year cumulative total of \$14,032,567.

In addition to \$1,048,000 granted to 40 agencies, JICSL awarded \$57,700 in scholarships to John's Island employees and their children. The JICSL Strategic Fund granted \$60,000 to the

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Early Learning Coalition to purchase quality curriculum and training for 16 VPK classrooms in Indian River County. And \$50,000 was contributed to the United Way's COVID-19 Community Response Fund, currently focused on rent and utilities assistance, food access and distribution, and diapers and formula.

"This is my first year as a co-chair, along with my excellent partner, Lynne Whipple," said Moore. "In addition to meeting all the dedicated and inspiring agency leaders, I am loving witnessing the excitement, enthusiasm and advocacy the site visits have brought out in all of our volunteers."

"It's been very satisfying dusting off 30 years of work skills and putting them to good use," said Whipple. "I thought retirement meant forgetting about the spreadsheets and conference calls, but it looks like they'll be around for another decade or two. And that's fine with me. The need in our county is enormous."

Noting that roughly half of Indian River County residents live below the federal poverty line or are among the working poor, Whipple says, "With our means and generosity, we have an extraordinary opportunity to make life-changing differences. I



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Betsy Fox, Pat Thompson, Hope Woodhouse, Ashby Longwell and Andrea Thibodeau.

come home from every site visit just thrilled. When asked 'How's it going?' I launch into yet another story about a fabulous agency that's making tremendous strides, thanks in part to us."

Stories from a few Agency Site Visits:

At **Literacy Services of IRC**, Moore met a woman who immigrated from

Columbia with her husband and worked in landscaping at the J.I. West Course. Since learning English from Literacy Services tutors, they have gotten driver's licenses, better jobs and own their own home. Their son is now an electrical engineer in the Navy and their daughter received a JICSL scholarship.

As a former horse owner, Moore was impressed with the therapeutic horseback riding programs of **Special Equestrians of the Treasure Coast**. She met a 9-year-old boy who was completely non-verbal when he first came to SETC at age 2. "His first word was when he called the horse he was riding 'Baby,'" says Moore. A 10-year-old girl with cerebral palsy had initially been unable to sit up. Now, assisted by volunteers, Moore says she is "sitting her horse with perfectly erect posture and a mile-wide grin on her face."

Safe Families for Children, a nationwide organization that uses volunteers to take in children on a short-term emergency basis, opened a Treasure Coast chapter in Vero Beach this past summer. At the site visit, they met a young, single mother of three little girls who had collapsed on the street due to a heart problem, and the family who cared for the girls while she was hospitalized. "Now, no longer alone, she has another family and other supportive friends circled around her and her girls," says Moore. "There was not a dry eye anywhere at the end of this site visit."

LifeBuilders of the Treasure Coast was started by Diamond Litty, the 19th Judicial Circuit's Public Defender, to help ex-offenders re-enter society and reduce recidivism. "I saw something that is so purpose driven and makes such a difference," says site team member Catherine Cooke. "When people are at their most desperate and you

show that they have value enough to be helped, then they are able to move forward and feel accountable to help the next person."

The **Senior Collaborative** was formed in August 2018 to deal with the imminent 'senior tsunami' by helping seniors and their families find information and service referrals. "The Senior Collaborative navigation system will make it possible to go online or call and get help from all sorts of different organizations," says site team member Tay Adams.

Since 2001, through **Take Stock in Children**, JICSL has enabled 44 low-income, first-generation Indian River County students to obtain 4-year degrees at Indian River State College. Students apply as eighth-graders and, if they remain drug- and crime-free and maintain good grades, their IRSC tuition is guaranteed. "These students are capable, responsible kids who typically don't identify themselves as college bound. The 'Take Stock in Children' program tells them otherwise," says Whipple.

Willis Sports, a baseball and academic program for disadvantaged children, now has 250 children who participate in its afterschool and summer programs. JICSL funds its 'Fun at Bat RBI' (Revitalizing Baseball in Inner Cities) program, open to children ages 6 to 14. "This is a little gem that operates on a shoestring," says Whipple. "The program continues to grow, the kids love it, and it gives the community an opportunity to use and to take pride in Dodgertown again."

The **Substance Awareness Center's ReDirect Program**, an indicated, prevention program, works with 12- to 18-year-olds, identified as engaging in substance abuse or other risky behaviors. ReDirect works in concert with 250 youth and their parents; the teens focus on identifying their strengths and goal setting, and the parents focus on family communication and early warning signs. "Initially, there was resistance," says Whipple. "Parents were worried it would waste their time and gas money. But early success showed otherwise."

Nestled amid Florida foliage near the lagoon, the **Pelican Island Audubon Society** is opening up the world of birds, plants and insects to 155 fifth-graders from low-income families. Taken hiking, kayaking and bird-watching, and recording it all in their journals, students are taught to love, respect and protect our natural surroundings. "Confidence emerges and some imagine a scientific career," says Whipple. "One girl overcame her fear of bunnies and another dipped her toe into the ocean for the first time. Grades go up; writing skills and vocabulary improve." ■



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