

PEOPLE

John's Islanders go above and beyond for charities

BY MARY SCHENKEL
Staff Writer

As they consistently demonstrate, John's Island residents are unequalled in their generosity to this community, each year contributing to organizations individually and through private foundations as well as through their two hugely philanthropic funding groups – the John's Island Foundation and the John's Island Community Service League.

Faced with an ever-growing need in the community for assistance, John's Islanders continue to meet the demand by donating increasingly large amounts to fill the coffers of local charities.

The John's Island Foundation recently announced the distribution of \$612,000 in grants to 19 local agencies, primarily those that serve the disadvantaged by providing basic human needs, such as food, shelter, special needs and healthcare assistance, abuse prevention/safety, and education. Dollar amounts, ranging from \$3,700 to \$50,000, were presented to assist the charities with essential capital expenditures.

"It's been a marvelous year," says Ken Wessel, who heads into his second term as board president, quickly giving credit to the enormous generosity of John's Island residents.

"The people of this community have been very, very supportive, and the board has been very active and willing to try new things. We're the only one, to my knowledge, in Indian River County to give grants strictly for capital needs, and that makes a difference.

"One interesting fact," says Emily Sherwood, JIF development/marketing chair, "roughly 90 percent of all funding received is distributed as grants, because we only raise funding through an annual appeal to residents. We're proud of that."

The industrious executive committee has undergone a couple of changes going into the next season: Pat Brier has assumed chairmanship of the Grant Review committee, after working this past year with Jay Anglada, who has stepped down from the position; and Margie Wheeler has taken over the position of secretary from Carole Parks.

With these recent distributions – the 2017-18 funding again exceeding that of prior years – the John's Island Foundation will have granted more than \$10.57 million to 84 different



Ken Wessel, Emily Sherwood and Don Kittell.
PHOTO: DENISE RITCHIE

nonprofit agencies in our community since its inception 19 years ago.

"We have noticed that some of the newer members of John's Island have recognized what we are doing and have been very serious contributors. The Leadership Circle (contributions of \$5,000 and up) went up to almost 47 percent last year and it's growing. We knew it was going to take some time, but that's where the newcomers come in as well; some are coming in at that level," Wessel adds.

"A few years ago we worked hard at strengthening our brand, because sometimes it's hard for people to understand the difference, when they first come here, between the John's Island Foundation and the John's Island Community Service League. We complement the work that the Service League does, so that we are able to help the people in need in Indian River County."

Every grant application is reviewed by a committee that includes nine site captains and 35 team members. The grants awarded this year include funding for computers and other technology, passenger vans, furniture, exercise and playground equipment, generators, portable classrooms, office and building renovations, refrigeration equipment and even equipment needed to connect to the city's waterline.

The four largest grants will enable the renovation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters "little house," the purchase of hurricane-proof windows at Gifford Youth Achievement Center, generators and a 12-passenger van at Hope for Families Center, and doors, windows, flooring and cabinets for the St. Francis Manor expansion.

"We are very, very conscious of governance," says Wessel. He notes that in addition to initial reviews of

an organization's structure, finances, board effectiveness and how well the agency mission is carried out, a follow-up audit process ensures that the funds are being utilized as intended.

"I'm humbled by being the president of this organization, but I can't emphasize enough that it's due to the people of John's Island being so

very generous," Wessel reiterates.

These John's Island Foundation grants are on top of the \$1.025 million granted this year by the John's Island Community Service League to fund the operational and program expenses of 39 agencies whose focus is on health, education and human services, and in scholarships to children of John's Island employees. ■



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