

# John's Islanders' generosity spreads far and wide

Written by: Mary Schenkel May 07 2020



John's Island residents have once again stepped up to the plate to support their less fortunate Indian River County neighbors, this time through the John's Island Foundation. Through its annual appeal, the John's Island Foundation has raised and distributed \$903,563; granting \$853,563 to 26 charitable agencies (10 of them in the \$40,000 and up range) and providing \$50,000 to the United Way of IRC COVID-19 Fund.

"We are a very lean organizational model," says Emily Sherwood, board president. She is rightfully proud that an analysis prepared by their treasurer, Don Kittell, indicates that 93 percent of contributions are distributed to agencies.

Sherwood notes that unlike the John's Island Service League, which she is quick to say is "doing a phenomenal job," the JI Foundation relies solely on annual appeal letters rather than fundraisers.

"I want to thank all residents of John's Island for their generosity. Without them, we could not do what we do," says Sherwood. "They are just filled with compassion. They open up their hearts and they allow us to provide this philanthropy to agencies that are helping those in need."

John's Island Foundation grants are targeted toward capital expenditures in the areas of health, education and financial stability, as opposed to the Service League, which provides grants for operational and programming expenses.

This year's grant requests from local agencies had all been submitted prior to the pandemic, and the 53-members of the grants committee, chaired by Pat Brier, were able to complete all their site visits before the stay-at-home mandate.

"We had such great team members who went out and did everything early," says Brier. Committee members each averaged three or four site visits, followed by writing reports and making presentations.

"These people are really putting a lot of time into it. It was over 1,000 hours by the time we added things up," says Brier. "It's not just that they're giving their money here; they're really getting to know the agencies that we're giving the funds to."

Commenting that she had no trouble finding volunteers, she adds, "I had people asking, could they do things. It's really nice that the John's Island community wants to be part of the greater community by interacting with them. When you get to know who your constituents are, then you know how to help them."

A new grantee this year was the Veterans Council of Indian River County for its Veterans Helping Veterans program, which assists veterans in need with home improvements. The grant enabled the Veterans Council to purchase capital items for the homes.

"That was a brand new one for us and it was a great need," says Brier.

Other construction-related grants were provided for projects such as a special needs group home at The Arc of IRC; the Boys & Girls Clubs Fellsmere Club; a Multipurpose Building at Camp Haven; and bleachers and a removable basketball court at the new Crossover Mission facility.

Other grants enabled nonprofits to purchase such items as office furniture, technical equipment, software, utility vehicles, air conditioners and windows.

"And we had the special Ellie McCabe grant," adds Sherwood, referencing a grant awarded to the Gifford Youth Achievement Center to honor the legacy of McCabe as the founder of the John's Island Foundation 20 years ago. "We gave them a \$50,000 grant to renovate their mental health and guidance office."

"I really feel like some of the gifts we've given to some of these agencies are coming into play now," says Brier. "Last year we gave a hot/cold food truck to Senior Resource Center, and now they're able to take more food out."

That nonprofit also benefited from the \$50,000 grant JI Foundation provided to the United Way for pandemic-related emergency capital expenditures.

"Senior Resources came to United Way and asked for a professional freezer, so that they could freeze more food," says Brier, who also sits on the UW COVID-19 Fund Allocation Committee. Funding has enabled the SRA Meals on Wheels program to weekly deliver one hot and four frozen meals to its clients.

"Some of our other grants that we gave last year are really helping now; the timing couldn't be better," says Brier. As an example, she references a grant last year to build a children's room at the Hope for Families Center.

“Now these families are literally staying in the Hope for Families Center; they can’t go anywhere,” Brier explains. “So now they have extra room for their children to be able to do their homework and use the computers.”

“That’s a great point,” Sherwood agrees. “A lot of what we did last year is bearing fruit during this pandemic.”

“I think it shows that capital grants span over years. It’s like the gift that keeps giving because it’s part of infrastructure,” says Brier. “We’re very happy we can fill that unique area right now.”

A current grant given to the Education Foundation of IRC for its Vision for Reading program builds on a grant they provided years ago.

“I wasn’t even aware of this until I actually went on the visit,” says Brier. “They have to test every child in school. We gave them the first round of vision screeners about eight or 10 years ago, and now we’re giving them four more this year. It shows you how long our gifts really last in the community.”

Another timely gift that Brier says “couldn’t have happened at a better time” was to purchase 42 brand-new computers for the Hibiscus Children’s Village.

“Pat wanted to really understand the need and sent an expert over there to look,” Sherwood explains. “He found out that the computers were so old they couldn’t accept new software. They were just completely useless. So we got them all new ones. That’s really good for them.”

“These are kids that have no choice; they’re living there. So now they can continue to do their homework, watch DVDs, take some cooking classes,” says Brier. “Again, it couldn’t have come at a better time. Sometimes things just work out.”

A grant to the Treasure Coast Food Bank for its Mobile Mercado was contingent upon them obtaining other grant funding, because, Brier explains, “it costs quite a bit of money.”

She was pleased that Impact 100 members voted to provide a \$100,000 Impact Grant to the Mobile Mercado project.

“That should get them on their way,” says Brier. “It’s a great program that Indian River County really needs; not just during COVID, but most times to help out the areas that really need help with fresh food.”

As they did last year, sometime around June 1 they will ask agencies interested in applying for grants to complete a short, simple Letter of Intent on the John’s Island Foundation website, indicating the amount they are requesting and what it will be used for.

“We’re going to try and get a handle on how many agencies are going to need help this year before we give them an application. The Letter of Intent helps all of us understand what we’re really looking at,” Brier explains. “If we think that it’s going to fit within our guidelines, we will then send an application back to the agency saying they are now qualified for the full application process.”

Seeing an ever-growing need in these uncertain times, Sherwood says, “Let’s hope our donors will continue to help us next year too, because this problem isn’t going to go away.”

For more information, visit [johnsislandfoundation.org](http://johnsislandfoundation.org).