

JOHN'S ISLAND FOUNDATION'S GRANTS FILLED CRITICAL VOID

by Mary Schenkel February 25, 2021



The global pandemic had not yet reached Vero Beach when John's Island Foundation volunteers began reviewing applications of charitable agencies applying for grants in its 2019-2020 cycle.

And in early May, when they distributed roughly \$850,000 to 26 agencies and another \$50,000 to the United Way of Indian River County COVID-19 Fund, they could not have realized just how prescient those gifts, as well as some from prior years, would be.

"We're looking at some of the grants we've given, before we even knew much about COVID, and we're seeing that they have been especially needed in the community this year," says Pat Brier, John's Island Foundation grants chair. "Our grants are a different type of grant; they're capital expenses, not operational. They help build infrastructure and capacity, so they live longer within the agencies. The money is not just helping them today, it's helping them tomorrow and, hopefully, for another few more years."

The John's Island Foundation provides grants for such capital expenditures as construction, equipment, vehicles, computers, furnishing and air conditioning.

"We are complementary with the John's Island Community Service League," says Emily Sherwood, JIF board president, noting that JICSL grants fund operational needs. "Between the two of us, we donate or invest over \$2 million in our community and that's an amazing statistic."

A review of John's Island Foundation grants over the past couple of years reveals many that have buoyed agencies during the pandemic.

"I realized that we had given Senior Resources a grant to buy a hot and cold food truck, so they would be able to move more meals into their Meals on Wheels program. Little did we know two years ago that this gift would be a much-needed help for that agency during COVID," says Brier. "So that's just one example of how our gifts just keep on giving."

"It's like a domino effect," says Sherwood.

This past spring, they were among several collaborative funders of a Treasure Coast Food Bank Mobile Mercado, a roving grocery for Indian River County residents otherwise unable to access grocery stores.

"We didn't know much about COVID when we gave these grants out. COVID had just started, and we had no way of knowing that boy, this could be a lifeline for some people," says Brier, adding that grant determinations are made in April. "We make decisions based on what's happening at the time.

There were some things that we discussed and weren't sure of, but that we ended up doing. And the reality is, we now look at them and say, 'Aren't we glad we did?'"

Grants span the charitable gamut, from children and seniors to healthcare and housing.

To address the consistently dire homeless situation, they provided grants to the Veterans Council, and to the Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council to meet capital needs that would enable people to remain in their homes.

Over the past couple of years, the John's Island Foundation has provided grants to the Visiting Nurse Association to refurbish its mobile healthcare units with brand-new, state-of-the-art technology, delivering another lifeline during the pandemic.

And funding for air conditioning at the Youth Guidance Mentoring Academy meant that it could remain open during the heat of the summer and into the school year.

For capital expenditures specific to the pandemic, the John's Island Foundation contributed \$50,000 to the United Way COVID-19 Emergency Response Fund.

That money enabled the Salvation Army to purchase an oven to feed additional people; the Redlands Christian Migrant Association got thermometers and hand washing stations for its local daycare centers; the Mental Health Association converted a closet into an office to help meet increased demand; the Senior Resource Association needed storage space and warming trays to help with the extra people they were feeding; and disinfectant sprayers and protective supplies were purchased by Crossover Mission and the Hope for Families Center.

"So again, we're trying to keep everybody safe and protected during COVID and at the same time these gifts and awards are going to stand for years," says Brier.

"We were obviously concerned and cautious when we began budgeting for this current fiscal year, which begins June 1, but the generosity of our donors has exceeded our expectations," adds Sherwood. "Our John's Island community truly understands the depths of need right now during the pandemic in our county and they have responded so generously. It's just so heartwarming for us to see the reaction, and that's even without our two thank-you events."

She is referencing their annual donor receptions, which for safety's sake were canceled.

"It really warms my heart that people are giving and are not expecting anything in return," says Sherwood. "They're just giving because they want to give and they're feeling that connection with the community."

Sherwood notes that they continually update their administrative functions to make them as efficient as possible, and stresses that 93 percent of every dollar directly benefits the charities.

"The only way we raise money is for the annual appeal, and it's a very successful appeal, considering that's all we do," says Sherwood.

"We can't do any of it without the members of our site review team, including our board members, who start in November with me and go all the way through to April looking into every one of these applications and spending time on them; whether it's going to a site, or this year Zooming like everybody else," says Brier. "They are so dedicated. We build relationships with the agencies in town; that's how it works."

They both relate how appreciative they are of all the little notes of thanks and photos that they receive.

"It just fills your heart with warmth and love," says Brier.