

The John's Island Foundation is making a difference in the lives of many who are less fortunate.

HELPING OUT WHERE HELP IS NEEDED MOST

BY ANN TAYLOR



A capital improvement grant from the John's Island Foundation helped Childcare Resources expand its commitment to providing affordable quality care for eligible working families.

Fifteen years ago, five John's Island residents gathered around Ellie McCabe's dining-room table to talk about forming a foundation. The idea behind it was to make grants to nonprofit agencies serving the basic human needs of Indian River County residents. The focus was to provide funds for capital improvements.

Don Macrae remembers the conversation well.

"I was excited by the idea. At the time I was vice president of the John's Island Club and I realized how many of our members had recently arrived and had no knowledge of the larger community and the tremendous needs that were out there. I was happy to serve on our initial board and, along with John Moore, helped write the original bylaws. I'm very proud of the John's Island Foundation, and I have to

DENISEE RITCHIE



Ellie McCabe and Don Macrae were instrumental in forming and guiding the Foundation that, over the course of 15 years, has raised \$8.6 million.

“The Foundation has established itself as an important resource for charities in our community. As the need continues to grow, the Foundation’s support will also need to grow with the help of the generosity of the members of John’s Island.”

– MARK EARLE, JOHN’S ISLAND FOUNDATION BOARD PRESIDENT



When the Shining Light Garden Foundation, a nonprofit organization that grows fresh vegetables to help feed the homeless, hungry and forgotten, applied for a grant to purchase a new tractor the John’s Island Foundation responded.



For a number of years the John’s Island Foundation has supported the needs of seniors living on a limited income at St. Frances Manor. A grant to rebuild the boardwalk where residents can enjoy meeting, greeting and admiring the scenery, is a perfect example.

give Ellie a great deal of the credit. She served as the first president, and her knowledge and guidance were invaluable.”

Earlier, if you had told Ellie, who was known for her philanthropic endeavors through the McCabe Foundation, that she would be chairing the newly formed organization she wouldn’t have believed you. The woman had quite different plans.

“I was in the process of ‘repotting myself,’” she says. “I was interested in a new challenge. I even thought I might write the great American novel. Then a gentleman named John Fauver came to me. He had moved to John’s Island from Lost Tree Village where there was a foundation and he felt we needed to have one here and he explained why. John also felt that I was the person to lead it. I gave a lot of thought to what he said and convinced myself I could do it. So I put off the repotting and never looked back. And I still haven’t written that novel!”

“The interesting thing about the John’s Island Foundation is that we only make grants to fund capital needs, which nobody was doing back then. We didn’t

want to compete with the John’s Island Community Service League, which funds programs, so we brought a member of their board onto our board. We also spoke to the people at United Way to see how we might fit into their spectrum.”

Jay McNamara, who served as the Foundation’s first vice president, recalls that conversation. “We wanted them to understand what we were doing and that it wasn’t going to infringe on monies donated to United Way,” he says. “My background was in marketing, and I knew it was important to get information about the Foundation off the ground, communicating what it was to the community and continually letting them know it was for capital funding – for buildings, equipment, vehicles, bricks-and-mortar kinds of things.

“I got a professional photographer, and we traveled all over the county shooting scenes of various charities, then put together a video. We also did mailers and asked key people if they would have a cocktail party where we could talk to others about the Foundation.”

“The number of people who are coming here is going through the roof. When I came to The Source we had been serving a little over 39,000 meals a year. By the end of my first year we had served 47,217 meals and the numbers are up again this year.”

– DENNIS BARTHOLOMEW, CEO OF THE SOURCE



DENISE RITCHE

A grant from JIF enabled The Source to make extensive renovations to its kitchen and food pantry. George Brown, Matt Martone and kitchen manager Chris Graves couldn't be happier. So is Dennis Bartholomew, the nonprofit organization's CEO. "There's someone in the kitchen cooking nonstop all day and we can do things now we couldn't before all because of the money from the John's Island Foundation. What an impact it's made."

As anticipated, there were still those who questioned why a Foundation was needed at all; after all, the John's Island Community Service League was already supporting the needs of a number of nonprofit agencies. In response, McNamara upped the communication level.

“The new John's Island clubhouse had just been built and we were looking for ways to get people familiar with the community and the Foundation. That's when the idea hit me – why not have a five o'clock general-interest session for members every Tuesday afternoon during the season? We'd have

DENISE RITCHE



Thanks to JIF funding the food pantry has been completely remodeled, allowing The Source to distribute food to the needy in a better, more efficient way.

speakers talk for a half-hour on a broad spectrum of subject matter, then have a Q and A. We started placing these little tent cards in the dining room telling everyone what the next 'five o'clock' was going to be, and people began to look forward to them.”

The more that members learned what the Foundation was all about, the more they embraced the idea. That first year, 20 potential donors were personally contacted and asked to contribute \$5,000 each, with board members John Fauver and Donald O'Neill leading the effort. Twelve months later, donations totaled \$427,831. Of that amount \$278,270 was granted to 22 agencies, with the largest ones made to the Gifford Youth Activity Center for a new classroom and to Habitat for Humanity for renovations to a town house. The Foundation was on its way.

“How rewarding it is for those of us who live in comfortable surroundings to know we are able to help those in such dire need.”

– STEVE ANDERSON

“We're a generous people,” says Ellie. “It was an honor for me to play a part in starting it, to contribute and see it grow, but it would be nowhere today without the people who continue to support it.”

That support has been tremendous. The number of donors has grown to 475, and over the course of 15 years a total of \$8.6 million has been raised. The list of agencies receiving grants is too long to note, but a \$50,000 grant made to The Source two years ago is a perfect example of the difference the Foundation's funding makes.

Dennis Bartholomew had just come on board as executive director when extensive renovations to the kitchen and food pantry were being made. “Because of the grant we were able to install a convection oven and eliminate one of the stoves that took forever to cook,” he says. “We also put in an industrial-type dishwasher, as well as a large cooler that is basically a walk-in refrigerator. We were able to remodel the entire food pantry, which has enabled us to do things in a whole new way. Before, we used to give someone a box with items in it. Now they can go in with a volunteer and pick the food they need and like.

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That impact was the result of making a strong case for capital funding. All nonprofit agencies applying for grants go through a rigorous review that includes site visits. Steve Anderson, who has chaired the grant review committee, knows firsthand the needs that are out there. “I think the review process puts you at the heart of what the Foundation does; it's kind of where the rubber meets the road.

“One of the things I did was look hard at the funding criteria, consolidating a lot of the good things that had been done in the past and documenting it so

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Steve Anderson, immediate past grant review chairman, Dan Somers, immediate past president, and Mark Earle, current president, have played a significant role in continuing the Foundation's focus of providing funds to local nonprofit agencies for capital improvements. Yet Somers will tell you it's not only about the money given, it's the personal involvement. "It's amazing to see how the exposure we have with these agencies gets our members stretched out in the community helping them."

that the information could be given to team captains and members. That way, those coming onto the committee for the first time have an understanding of what to do when they interact with the agencies. How rewarding it is for those of us who live in comfortable surroundings to know we are able to help those in such dire need. But we don't do it in a big public way; our fundraising is very much under the radar."

that's been the intent since the beginning. When Dan Somers moved to John's Island nine years ago, he liked what he heard about the Foundation and wasted no time in signing on to be a member of the site-review committee. It opened his eyes.

"What we do for the community and how we go about doing it is what makes the Foundation

special," he says. "Anyone who lives in Vero Beach knows there's a part of the city that enjoys comfort and wealth, and there's a part that's uncomfortable and lacks wealth. The 2004 hurricanes and the economic meltdowns in '07 and '08 caused an increase in poverty and an increase in the need for charities to reach out and touch those who need help. To be able to share our funds and also our time is really quite special.

"We've given freezers and trucks to the Treasure Coast Food Bank, we've constructed playgrounds and sidewalks, built additions on to buildings, and funded homes for both Habitat for Humanity and Every Dream Has A Price. We've given grants to the Mental Health Association, the Homeless Family Center, SunUp ARC and the Senior Resource Center – it's all across the board and it's enlightening to see how much our funds have helped.

"It's not only about the money," Somers adds. "It's amazing to see how the exposure we have with these agencies gets our members stretched out in the community helping them. We have folks who are involved in Habitat, and I'm working with the Boys & Girls Club along with Jay McNamara. It's not just financial, it's the wisdom and leadership we've gained over the years. I was on the team that made a site visit to Hibiscus Children's Center where Tom Maher was the CEO at the time, and was blown away with what the folks there were doing. As a result of that visit, I served on the Hibiscus Indian River County Advisory Board for five years. That's one of the beauties of being retired – you can take the skills you used for years in business into the community."

There's one site visit that Somers will long remember. "We had a grant request from Restoration House in Fort Pierce, and several of us went down to see what the facility does. A therapist there brought in five women who talked about what it meant to them to be there. They had been drug addicts, were battered and beaten, and we all had tears in our eyes as they told us what they had been through and what being at Restoration House has meant to them.

"The success rate there is 95 percent and, because about half the group is from Indian River County, we felt we could give our support. The first grant we gave was for new furniture and beds; the last grant provided a five-passenger vehicle so the women could be driven to job interviews. It's typical of the way that the Foundation touches the lives of so many. What we do makes a real difference." ❁