



# THE YEAR-ROUNDER

a newsletter of Island Housing Trust  
Volume 19 | Issue 2 | Fall/Winter 2023

## MEET CONNIE JAN SEARS

By Gail La Rosa Thompson, IHT Director of Advancement



**She wanted to be sure that her house and property remained affordable and year-round.**

It's no surprise that Connie Jan Sears reached out to Island Housing Trust when she decided it was time to move from her house on Sound Drive in Mount Desert. Connie Jan's background is in social work and community building, and she wanted to be sure that her house and property remained affordable and year-round.

In her working life, Connie Jan was a social worker in New Hampshire, advocating for families. Asked 40 years ago what she would do with \$1 million ("\$10 million today", she joked), Connie Jan said she would build a community for families, offering all services including childcare and transportation. Retiring to Maine in 2004, Connie Jan went back to work at the Emmaus Homeless Center. There

she met Dawn Coffin, founder and visionary of the Families First Community Center in Ellsworth. This was her vision, come to life. Connie Jan served on the board of FFCC, as it began its mission of helping homeless families and helping it grow to the fully formed nonprofit it is today.

Recently, Connie Jan began to realize that she couldn't give her house in Mount Desert the care and improvements it needed; she put on a new roof and replaced some windows but then had to quit. She saw an article about IHT in the Mount Desert Islander and thought this might be the solution. Connie Jan reached out to Marla O'Byrne, IHT executive director, to ask if this was

*(continued inside)*



ISLAND HOUSING TRUST

## JONES MARSH UPDATE: *Digging Your Roots In*



This fall, IHT contracted with Arra Homescaping to complete the landscaping around the new homes at Jones Marsh. Hilary Hodgdon, owner of Arra

Homescaping, and her crew brought in sod for new lawns and crushed stone for drip edges and parking pads. “Using sod makes things look complete immediately and we wanted residents to feel like they were coming home,” said Hilary. The new landscaping will allow the residents to create flower beds or plant trees in the spring, making each home unique.

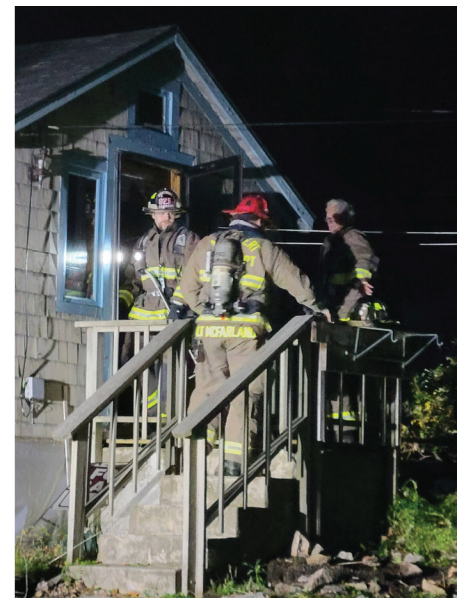
Hilary started Arra Homescaping in 2017. She and her husband Ben were

both born and raised on MDI and understand the scope of the housing problem on the island. Arra’s goal is to protect this island and its future, and that includes the communities our children grow up in. “Our roots are here, and we are honored to create a space where others can have that same experience,” said Hilary.

Many of Hilary’s crew commute from over an hour away and she knows how hard it can be to find and retain employees who want to live where they work. “This project helped Arra become part of the solution,” noted Hilary, “and we were happy to work with IHT on this neighborhood. We



look forward to completing the project next spring as new homeowners move in.”



*CONNIE, continued*

something that might be of interest. IHT agreed to purchase the property, enabling Connie Jan to buy a new home in Orland. The house she sold required extensive work, which unfortunately would make it unaffordable to eligible buyers. The

decision was made to demolish the house and bank the beautiful 1.2-acre property for a townhouse or two smaller single-family houses in the future.

Meanwhile, the old house continues to give back to the island, serving

recently as a training ground for the Mount Desert Fire Department. Soon it will be gone, but Connie Jan’s memories of it will remain as she awaits the changes to come.

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## MISSION

Island Housing Trust promotes viable, year-round communities by advancing permanent workforce housing on Mount Desert Island, Maine.

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## ISLAND NOTES

As the first snowflakes of winter fall on Mount Desert Island, I watch the bustle of activity in my neighborhood. Plows rumble down my street, and I know if the snow builds up at the end of my drive, one of my neighbors will help clear it. My mind is filled with thoughts of our close-knit community, and I recall the many ways I have both received and given what was needed to make it through the long dark season. I'm reminded of our shared resilience and the ways we've come together in the face of challenges, each playing a part in making our island a special place to live.

Looking back on 2023, we accomplished so much together. New houses were occupied in the Jones Marsh neighborhood, providing homes and security to six households. We will complete Jones Marsh in early 2024, with families in four additional homes. We wish all our homeowners the best as they settle in and work to create a harmonious and supportive neighborhood.

As we look forward to 2024, we're eagerly preparing for Phase 3 of the Ripples Hill neighborhood, which holds the potential for 10 additional houses. We are reviewing the plans and talking with current Ripples homeowners as we prepare to build this final phase. We are just now

beginning to raise the funds needed to make complete this neighborhood.

In March of this year, IHT participated in the planning and leading of a housing summit that brought dozens of people to talk about housing solutions – those underway and those that are needed. The Housing Solutions Summit was intended to begin conversations and collaborations, and it has been fulfilling that intent. You can read more about what's happening in this newsletter.

IHT can look forward with excitement for the possibilities ahead because of the support you and others have provided. You've been willing to share expertise, time, land, buildings, funds, whatever you have had to enable us to create year-round housing opportunities. Thank you for believing that community members can make a difference, one by one.

Wishing you a season filled with warmth, joy, and the company of good neighbors.

Marla O'Byrne  
Executive Director



EAGER EYE PHOTOGRAPHY



## MDI HOUSING SOLUTIONS INITIATIVE

Last March, more than 70 local leaders gathered for an all-day meeting to discuss the various efforts underway or in planning to address Mount Desert Island's housing crisis. The Musson Group, a local land use planning and economic development firm, led a steering committee of seven individuals representing nonprofit, community planning, real estate, and local business perspectives to plan and lead the MDI Housing Solutions Summit. Ideas generated and shared at the event were captured in the MDI Housing Solutions Summit Summary Report.

Following the success of the summit, this effort has evolved into the MDI Housing Solutions Initiative. On behalf of the Housing Solutions Steering Committee, the Musson Group applied for and

received a \$75,000 grant from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, to facilitate the implementation of projects identified at the 2023 Housing Solutions Summit. The Musson Group was one of thirteen recipients in the state to receive this grant award, which was supported by all four MDI towns, Friends of Acadia, Island Housing Trust, and Mount Desert 365.

Since the March summit, the Musson Group has been planning and facilitating island-wide housing efforts in close coordination with IHT, municipal governments, local businesses, institutions, and non-profits. Local non-profits have met to discuss possible sources and means to raise more money for new housing opportunities. MDI

residents in the creative sector are meeting regularly as part of this initiative to talk about how efforts are described and conveyed, the importance of historical perspectives, and the potential for new graphical storytelling that could expand the understanding of and already growing support for housing efforts.



A Housing Solutions Summit is in the works for next year, to provide an opportunity to

follow up on the progress over the past year and to continue to build on previous and ongoing efforts. To follow the MDI Housing Solutions Initiative, check out the website at [mdihousingsolutions.org](https://mdihousingsolutions.org).



## YOUR GIFTS HAVE IMPACT!

One of Mount Desert Island's strengths is its unique blend of vibrant communities, each contributing to a greater whole. The island is a place where locals, summer visitors, workers, young innovators, and retirees all come together to form a rich mosaic of life. It's a place that many of us are proud to call home.

Please join our supporters in making MDI a place where everyone can find a home. With your help, we can keep our mosaic intact, supporting the beautiful communities that make up Mount Desert Island.

## DISCOVER IHT NEIGHBORHOODS



### RIPPLES HILL

- Located in Mount Desert, off Beech Hill Road
- First house completed in 2008
- Phase 1 completed in 2011
- Phase 2 completed in 2017
- Phase 3 in contracting stage
- Nine single family homes, 10 more homes in Phase 3
- Over 30 residents



### JONES MARSH

- Located in Bar Harbor, near the head of the island
- First modular homes delivered in 2022
- Eight single-family homes, two townhomes for 10 units
- Final homes will be completed in early 2024
- Approximately 16 residents



### SABAH WOODS

- Located in Bar Harbor, Route 3 near Hadley Point
- First house completed in 2009
- Final house completed in 2016
- Four single family homes
- 10+ residents



### HOAP HOUSES

- Located across the island
- First down payment assistance granted in 2012
- IHT provided down payments for 18 homes
- Almost 50 residents in HOAP homes

## DID YOU KNOW?

You can support IHT with:

### YOUR DONOR ADVISED FUND

- Recommend a grant to IHT
- Set up a recurring gift
- Name IHT as your DAF beneficiary

### APPRECIATED SECURITIES (STOCKS)

- Significant tax savings when you give stock instead of cash
- Save on capital gains tax
- Receive income tax deductions for the present value of the stock

### QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION

- For donors over 70 ½ years old
- Transfer funds directly from your traditional IRA account to IHT
- See meaningful tax benefits from your charitable contributions

### YOUR ESTATE

- Include IHT in your will or other estate plans
- Leave a home or land to IHT

*For additional information on the best way for you to support Island Housing Trust, please contact Gail Thompson, Director of Advancement:*

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## Welcome to IHT's New Members: We appreciate your support!

*April 1–November 30, 2023*

- |                                   |  |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| Artemis Gallery                   | Anne-Marie Hart                            | Paulette and Steve Phillips       |
| Joyce and Stephen Ashley          | Becky and Daniel Haynes                    | Ruth Poland and<br>Jesse Wheeler  |
| Jayne and David Ashworth          | Judith and Fritz Heimann                   | Frederick Rogers                  |
| Jean Bonville                     | Lisa Heimann and<br>Jeffrey Jones          | Ryan and Connie Schultz           |
| Jane Boynton                      | Sandra Henderson                           | Nancy and John Scott              |
| Jennifer Bucklin                  | Janice and<br>Douglas Hopkins              | Sheets Smith Wealth<br>Management |
| Coastal Drilling and Blasting     | Maine Community<br>Foundation, Spirit Fund | Kathy Shultz                      |
| College of the Atlantic           | Karin Marchetti                            | Jody and Richard Simpson          |
| Millard Dority                    | Mary McCall                                | Sheila Smallidge                  |
| Rita and John Doyle               | MCM Electric                               | Pamela J. Smith                   |
| Kyle Duckworth                    | Milk & Honey                               | Lu and Rob St. Germain            |
| Susan and Ralph Erickson          | Cindy Minutolo                             | Swallowfield                      |
| FB Heron Foundation               | Carol and Walter Muth                      | Cynthia and Leslie Thurston       |
| John Goodson                      | Kathryn and Tom Nelson                     | Chris Hudson and<br>Patti Tracey  |
| Priscilla Granston                | Ann R. Paine                               | Jill Weber                        |
| Priscilla Grant and<br>Nan Hunter |  |                                   |
| Douglass Gray                     |  |                                   |

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