

Orcas Angels on a Mission

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They're not Charlie's Angels. They don't get their orders from a faraway voice over a phone line. But they have plenty of missions and a flair for getting them done.

Orcas residents Jill Blankenship, Liz Longworth, and Lori Gates have just announced the formation of the newest non-profit organization serving the local community. They call themselves Orcas Angels.

"We deliver hope, compassion and assistance to anyone in need," Blankenship said.

The Angels started three years ago when the three women came together to put on a fundraiser for Relay for Life. They found they had a knack for raising funds and started thinking about forming their own non-profit.

"One of our slogans is 'No islander left behind,'" Longworth said.

Blankenship acknowledged there is already an abundance of worthy, helping organizations on Orcas, but thinks Orcas Angels will connect the dots between them and pull from word-of-mouth resources as well.

"I think we can offer additional contact with certain community members that we touch and guide them to the different resources that are out there," Blankenship said.

Longworth and Gates both work at Country Corner. Longworth finds community needs become apparent through word of mouth that travels in their community hub.

One example of Orcas Angels at work began at Country Corner. When the husband of one of Longworth's employees, Debra Barry, was diagnosed with cancer and faced surgery and chemotherapy, it was devastating.

"It just kinda hit us all at once," Barry said.

Orcas Angels put together a wood raffle, not only raising a cash donation for the Barrys, but they were able to spin the original donation into taking flight and fulfilling other Orcas needs. Another entire cord of wood was donated and the winner of the raffle, Betsy Greacen, told Orcas Angels to find someone more in need of it to give the wood to.

"She said, 'I need it. I could use it, but I'm sure you girls know someone who could use it more,'" Longworth said.



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From left to right, Liz Longworth, Lori Gates, and Jill Blankenship are the Orcas Angels.

The wood ended up at Orcas Island Community Church who used it for their wood drive, helping those in need of heat this winter.

It was hard for Barry to put into words how the unexpected appeal on her family's behalf provided support in their time of need.

"It was really nice how the community reached out," Barry said choking back emotion. "I just wanted to say a big thank you to the community. I've had people come up to me and say, 'You're in my prayers' and that is just really nice. It's an emotional time for both of us. All you can do is just plug along and go with the flow and that's what we're doing."

Longworth has seen the needs of the Orcas community increase. She referenced seasonal work ending, the decrease in new construction and the closing of Rosario Resort.

"There is always someone who needs help," Longworth said. "We all want to be able to help each other out."

Blankenship likes the freedom that being a non-profit provides in the philanthropic endeavors of Orcas Angels. Rather than having to coordinate with the managements of a benefiting non-profit, Orcas Angels can do what they do best: coordinate creative and fun ways to raise money all on their own. She thinks of Orcas Angels as a middle man between people in need and resources.

"We touch people in ways that certain resources don't. It's hard to find what's out there. We have the energy to be able to find help when it's needed," Blankenship said. "We made it official about a month ago."

Blankenship said Orcas Angels share a common ground of dedication and drive to put on a fundraising event. Longworth agreed.

"It's like we were meant to do this. We all bring something different to the table. We have a lot of heart here," Longworth said.

Orcas Angels, who has raised funds mostly for individuals but also raised money for DVSA and Relay for Life, will launch their web site in January and will host their first open meeting on Feb. 6 at Country Cellars.

Longworth can be reached at 360-317-6702 and Blankenship at 360-632-4600.

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