

# The Guardian Angels of Orcas

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Islands Sounder Reporter

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It all started five years ago with a broken leg that left an islander unable to work throughout the winter. A group of ladies at Country Corner put a donation can next to the checkout and started raising funds.

“It seemed that every month there was someone new who was in need,” said Liz Longworth, manager at Country Corner.

So along with Jill Blankenship and Lori Gates, she continued answering these calls for help.

“We realized that we were good at this and that the people of Orcas needed us to be bigger,” Longworth said. “There it began, our adventure to becoming a legit nonprofit so we could serve the community we love so much.”



CALI BAGBY/STAFF PHOTO

Left to right: Liz Longworth, Jill Blankenship and Lori Gates, the founding members of the Orcas Angels.

In 2011, they officially became a nonprofit and called themselves [the Orcas Angels](#). Blankenship estimates that they have raised \$8,000 to \$10,000 each year.

“We never thought it would get so big, we are just chicks who wanted to help,” Gates said. “It’s been great to see how the community is totally behind us and really supportive.”

They have delivered dinner to islanders receiving chemotherapy, provided clothing and shelter to those fallen victim to house fires and built ramps for those who couldn’t get into their own homes.

And their good deeds have propelled a whole chain of philanthropy.

Prior to becoming a nonprofit, the women held a firewood auction, and the winner donated the wood to the Orcas Community Church, which in turn gave it to multiple families struggling to keep warm. The County Corner gals also joined with the Frontline Call Center, which Blankenship owns, raising nearly \$2,000 for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services of the San Juan Islands.

The Angels has a board of five people and 10 to 25 volunteers at each event. They often see people they have helped in the past show up to volunteer.

“A lot of people have helped to give back and they are proud to do that,” Blankenship said.

Despite the fact that all of their board members have families and full-time jobs they find time to hold fundraisers like car washes, yard sales, waffle breakfasts, prime rib dinners and more.

“We are people who believe that if you put forth the effort to support those in your community, we can make Orcas Island a better and more sustainable place for all who are lucky enough to find themselves

here,” Longworth said. “Without the passionate people we are so fortunate to have, there would be many unmet needs on this island. All it takes is the drive and time to fundraise and a whole lot of heart.”

And the ball keeps rolling – like with the Angels’ Tech for Success Program. Last year, four new laptops and printers were awarded to students headed to college who could not afford their own computers. To add icing on the cake, the computers were installed with programs to aid students in their chosen career path. The Angels have also joined forces with the Girl Scouts this year and walked beside them in the July 4 parade.

“We want to help teach them to support the community,” Longworth said. “We should all take care of each other and that’s what we are trying to pass along to people – even to kids, they are the future of Orcas Angels and Orcas Island.”

And after months of work, the Angels’ have even developed their own private wine label, launching this week, to help raise more funds. The wine, made by Randy Finley at Mt. Baker Winery, is now available at Country Corner.

“We are really excited to get our name out there on every table on Orcas,” Longworth said.

Orcas Angels are also being highlighted as Islanders’ Bank “featured” nonprofit.

“We really want the community to know that we are working hard to help them out whenever it may be necessary,” said Longworth.

To volunteer, contact Dyan via the [Orcas Angels Facebook page](#), 376volunteer@gmail.com, or at [www.orcasangels.org](http://www.orcasangels.org). To make a donation, go to Islanders’ Bank or drop it off at Country Corner. For more info, call 1-800-420-4542 or visit the website.

– The Angels’ Taco Fiesta is on Sept. 7 at the American Legion 5 – 8 p.m. They will be pre-selling tickets at Country Corner and Islanders’ Bank for \$12 or \$14 at the door.

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