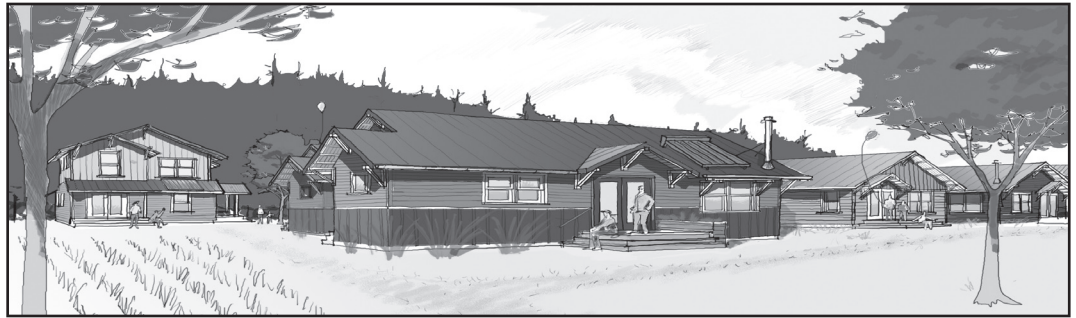


SUMMER 2008

# OPAL NEWSLETTER

HOUSING ISLAND PEOPLE, HELPING TO MAINTAIN ISLAND CHARACTER

## MT. BAKER ROAD: A NEW NAME AND WORK UNDERWAY!



Rendering by David Kan

The neighborhood at Wild Rose Meadow will look similar to this next year.

After many delays, ground is broken, permits are in hand, foundations are poured, panels are being built and the Mt. Baker Road project has a name: "Wild Rose Meadow." The homebuyers selected the name during their regular monthly meetings, along with the name of the neighborhood access street: Rosehip Road.



John and Vicki Clancy are among the first homebuyers selecting paint schemes for the exterior of their house.

Pictures of the project are uploaded to the web periodically and may be viewed through a link on OPAL's website: [www.opalclt.org/news](http://www.opalclt.org/news).

We'll be offering guided tours of the site on September 10th from 5 to 7 p.m. Parking will be at Orcas Center or the Medical Center, with a limited availability at the construction site for those who won't be able to walk in and walk the tour. RSVP to the OPAL office at 376-3191 to let us know you'll be coming.



Panels arrived August 11; by midday August 13 five houses looked like these three. The Louws Truss crew takes about 1-1/2 hours to install panels for the exterior and put up inside walls in these one-bedroom homes.

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: LISA BYERS

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### THE COUNTY'S ROLE IN AFFORDABLE HOUSING

People often ask what the county can do to help affordable housing efforts. Through the years, I have joined with others to recommend land use policies that would support the creation of affordable housing. Now, after a very frustrating stretch, I have some new suggestions related to clearing up inconsistencies in the development codes and establishing internal systems for efficiently processing permit applications.

The good news is that county staff members are aware of problems and trying to implement improvements. The bad news is that OPAL's Wild Rose Meadow project got caught in the midst of changing practices and as a result has suffered more than six months of delays that, in turn, have resulted in higher costs, threatened the loss of construction crew, and increased homebuyers' anxiety levels.

I will not go into detail about the causes of the delays, because a proper explanation would take too much space, but I do want to share with you the solutions I have recommended to the county, and encourage you to advocate for changes in county policy so that what OPAL has experienced does not happen again.

I recommend the following policies or practices:

1. When a new standard is imposed, such as the state Department of Ecology requiring adherence to their wetlands guidelines because they deem the county's regulations to be insufficient, issue a notice to inform applicants of this change in rule.
2. Assure land use policies adopted by the council are worded to minimize or not create inconsistencies or unintended consequences. This speaks to the need for a fully staffed planning department with appropriate expertise.
3. Establish criteria to define when the county attorney should provide interpretations of county code, and when a department head may reasonably expect to be able to make those interpretations. Sending every interpretation to the county attorney is inefficient and unnecessary.
4. Establish communication systems that allow all county personnel responsible for reviewing permits to track the comments, questions and approvals of other personnel on the same project. This would reduce or eliminate county personnel asking an applicant questions that have already been answered, or researching an issue that has already been addressed.

As election season draws near, we are reminded that we all bear responsibility for the way our government functions. I urge you to take the time to educate our elected and appointed officials about the implications of their policies and practices. And, of course, please vote. Your voice matters.

With gratitude for your help and support,

*Lisa Byers*

## WILD ROSE MEADOW PROSPECTIVE HOMEOWNER

### CINDY McGRADY NAGORSKY



Cindy McGrady Nagorsky and Ruby, ready for a morning workout.

Cindy McGrady Nagorsky has called Orcas Island home for almost 14 years, but it wasn't until November 2007 that this single grandma talked with OPAL about the possibility of owning a home of her own. She didn't ever think she'd have a new house, much less one within walking distance of town, and her family.

Cindy and her frequent companion, border collie Ruby, are poised to purchase a one-bedroom home in the Wild Rose Meadow neighborhood. She looks forward to having her grandkids (Caleb and Ahriana Dean) visit on their way home from school. Cindy has played a significant role in helping her son, Jason, raise his kids, and fondly recalls her first visits to the Bonnie Brae neighborhood when Caleb was a baby.

Describing the existing OPAL neighborhoods, Cindy observes, "The people who live in these neighborhoods are wonderful, diverse, creative, very aware and conscious of their environment. They are people who are creating community and making the world a better place." She believes OPAL has learned from each development and has applied those lessons to Wild Rose Meadow. She's looking forward to Robin Kucklick's influence on plantings in her new neighborhood. She says the grounds at Opal Commons are her favorites among the existing OPAL communities.

Cindy moved here from Portland, Oregon., where she lived in a community with an abundance of character, demonstrated in the plants, trees and houses. "It felt really good living in a neighborhood, but I didn't know my neighbors as well as I will in this one."

"I love having the diversity of ages in our community," she adds. "We'll have kids, single middle-aged women, and older couples. Near my home we'll all be single women, and I expect it will be a neighborhood of quiet energy."

Cindy enjoys the process of making decisions together. She describes creating the CC&Rs (Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions) as "an amazing process in participatory democracy. In OPAL communities, we make decisions by consensus – we find a way to make it work for everyone. I never feel pushed into something that won't work for me. It teaches you to use your voice."

Cindy provides elder care, and she's an accomplished artist who has several pieces in the Lambiel Museum. She paints in watercolors and is learning acrylics. She has studied painting on rice paper with a Chinese art professor and watercolor with Jean Putnam, having started art school in Portland when Jason started college 15 years ago.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to own a home on Orcas Island. I never thought I'd be able to," Cindy says.

"Julie (Brunner, OPAL housing manager) told me about Wild Rose Meadow, and I was so impressed with the idea, the green building, that I knew it was a good thing to be involved with." Cindy likes small interior spaces, describing them as very good for the environment as well as her finances – and besides, having a smaller house gives Ruby a bigger yard, she adds.

## OPAL NEWS, PROJECTS AND STAFF CHANGE

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### ENDOW ORCAS - ENDOW OPAL

Since January, OPAL has been one of nine island nonprofits participating in a training and collaborative effort called Endow Orcas that has been spearheaded by the Orcas Island Community Foundation (OICF). The intent of Endow Orcas is to encourage those who care about the island to make legacy gifts that will nurture and sustain this island community into the future.

Each of the participating organizations – OPAL included – has developed a description for how long-term, permanently restricted funds would be used to support our missions, and what policies and practices we need to put in place.

We'll be telling you more about this in the months and years to come. As a first step, we'd like to share with you that the OPAL board has identified three separate legacy funds:

- 1. Unrestricted Endowment.** Income from unrestricted endowment principal will support OPAL's enduring stewardship of the land, homeowners and houses.
- 2. Land Acquisition and Stewardship Fund.** As land prices on the island continue to rise, it has become harder for OPAL to purchase land suitable for affordable housing. In particular, it is hard to respond quickly to opportunities that arise. A land acquisition fund will allow a more nimble response.
- 3. Loan Fund.** This fund has two related uses: (a) bridge loans to support OPAL's ongoing activities; (b) revolving loan funds for homebuyers, particularly those whose income is too high to qualify for government subsidies but who are still unable to purchase a home in the open market on the island.

If you have questions or suggestions, or wish to talk with us further about legacy giving, contact a trustee or Lisa Byers at 376-3191. Please consider including OPAL in your estate planning, and consider letting us know which legacy fund you support.

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### FACES OF OPAL: STEVE SCHILLER

In May Steve Schiller joined the OPAL team in the newly created position of property and project manager. He'll oversee the design and construction of new projects, tasks similar to those performed by his predecessor, Gabriel Olmsted. In addition, Steve will be responsible for overseeing the maintenance of OPAL's rental properties and will serve as a resource for OPAL homeowners. He brings expertise in permaculture design, erosion and sediment control, and low-impact design as well as a wealth of hands-on knowledge about living green. He holds a BA from UC Davis in landscape architecture and has also studied anthropology.

In his previous position, Steve was responsible for projects at a complex private development. His activities included design and engineering, site and infrastructure preparation, and managing a variety of systems, including potable water, storm-water-pollution prevention, irrigation, and planting. He evaluated eco-building techniques, performed site surveying and mapping, and maintained existing infrastructure, including five houses.

Steve has many interests including fly fishing (he ties his own), playing guitar, travel and soccer. He's built his family's yurt. He has the traditional German and Japanese tools to make hand hewn timber and timber framing, and plans to some day build a house "without power". Steve and his wife, Jenny, have two young children, Katarina and Karl August. They've lived on Orcas since 2002. Please welcome Steve to the OPAL family.



Steve Schiller

## PURCHASE OF LAVENDER HOLLOW APARTMENTS DELAYED

OPAL's plan to purchase the Lavender Hollow Apartments – 22 apartments in eight buildings located just north of Eastsound's commercial core – has been delayed. The purchase is contingent on being awarded a grant from the Washington State Housing Trust Fund, for which OPAL applied in March, requesting just over \$984,000. Although the grant reviewers stated their support for the project, they declined the application because the mortgage lender had not yet approved the transfer of ownership.



The mortgage lender, USDA Rural Development, offers a mortgage interest rate of just 1 percent, making this federal agency a necessary partner in keeping these rentals affordable. USDA's procedure for approving a transfer of ownership usually takes one to two years.

After learning of the grant decline, Lisa Byers conferred with USDA staff, who created a speeded-up transfer timeline such that if OPAL's fall application to the Housing Trust Fund is successful this time, OPAL should be able to complete the purchase next spring. Wally Gudgell, one

of the current owners, swiftly got approval from his group to extend the terms of OPAL's offer to purchase the property. "Wally understands the importance of Lavender Hollow as a resource, and he wants to work with us to make sure it continues to serve its tenants," Byers notes.

Expenses for assessing the buildings' condition and preparing cost estimates for repairs have been supported by grants from the San Juan County Housing Bank and the Orcas Island Community Foundation. "Without that local support, it would have been very difficult for us to take the risk to pursue this purchase," said Byers. "The local grants demonstrate to the state and federal folks that this is a local priority. We are so grateful for the financial help."

OPAL's board of trustees decided to pursue the purchase of Lavender Hollow because they believe the best option for preserving the apartments for lower-income rentals is for a local nonprofit organization to own and manage them.

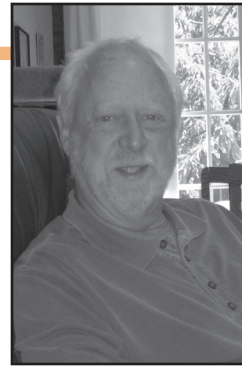
### *2008 house parties bring new OPAL members*

Friends of OPAL are hosting a series of six house parties to introduce OPAL to prospective new members. Many thanks to Penny and Carl Buttke, to Jim Connell and Cris Chandler, and to Allen and Sara Smith for the parties they have already hosted. Three more parties are scheduled for September, hosted by Joan and John Fletcher, Helen Bee and Carl de Boer, and Phil and Nancy Weatherspoon. These intimate gatherings are a great way for people to hear the OPAL story, to have a chance to talk to OPAL homeowners and board members, to ask questions about the need for OPAL and how it functions. We are delighted to welcome the many new members who have joined OPAL as a result of these gatherings.

## THANK YOU, GABRIEL OLMSTED

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After six years as OPAL's project manager, Gabriel Olmsted has moved on, hanging out his shingle as a consultant. At a thank-you celebration in his honor, Lisa Byers remarked, "Gabriel has been a visionary on our projects. He has a keen eye for design, and during his time with OPAL he carried the 'green' torch – doing the research that enabled us to build healthier buildings with more durable materials."



Gabriel Olmsted

Gabriel honed his expertise in green building design and development by learning on the job. His first assignment was to pick up midway through the Oberon Wood neighborhood's development, and then he supervised the construction of the Reddick apartments and offices from start to finish. His crowning achievements were the design process and project completion of the Lahari Ridge neighborhood and the Madrona Street cottages. He especially enjoyed how we were able to work with the land at Lahari and notes that we adapted the plat map we inherited in a way that was satisfying to the Lahari Hospice community as well.

"My focus was to build better houses for not much money," he said. Now that OPAL has 58 ownership homes and 7 rental apartments, there's more property management, asset management, and maintenance to add to the workload, not to mention owner education, the prospect of owning Lavender Hollow, and more. Gabriel worked about two days a week, and now the position is close to full-time.

Gabriel, in a manner typical of his personality, takes the longer view that this staffing change represents a positive evolution of the work – necessary to respond to OPAL's growth and to embrace the increased responsibilities of property management. Steve Schiller has been hired to the newly created position of property and project manager [see story on page 4].

In addition to consulting locally, Gabriel has joined Allison Handler as an associate at the Portland-based Heron River Group, a provider of technical services for nonprofits. He is involved with affordable housing and community land trusts in Anacortes and Skagit County, as well as providing trainings at national conferences. "Gabriel has a lot of fans in the CLT movement," Lisa adds. "He has been a leader in bringing 'green' together with 'affordable.' Although he is no longer on staff, I know that we will tap into his expertise as we go forward."

### MISSION

The mission of OPAL Community Land Trust is to acquire and own land so that islanders in need may have access to permanently affordable homes and workplaces. OPAL collaborates with others, develops improvements, and stewards the land in a manner that is cooperative, stable, environmentally sensitive, and socially responsible.

## MEET THE MEMBERS

### MEET THE MEMBERS: PENNY AND CARL BUTTKE



Photo by Suzanne Olson

Penny and Carl Buttke

The need for affordable housing is nothing new to Carl and Penny Buttke, who have lived in Sun Valley, Idaho, and central Oregon, communities where housing has skyrocketed beyond the reach of most people. They moved to Orcas in October of 2005 to be near their daughter, son-in-law and grandkids – and to return home to the Pacific Northwest.

Carl had a consulting engineering practice in Portland, Oregon, where he is known as the “father of the transit mall.” In addition to designing the downtown public transportation system, he also consulted with Oregon Health Sciences University on their campus and transportation designs. On Orcas, he is enjoying his avocation in painting – mostly watercolor. His paintings are showing at the Crow Valley Pottery gallery and appeared in the Plein Air show.

Now that their house in the Rosario area is finished, Penny is enjoying gardening – another reason for their return to the Pacific Northwest – and is really excited to have roses in her life again. She has also turned her attention toward OPAL, joining the fundraising and auction committee. She and Carl hosted an OPAL house party in May and she is busy planning a number of other house parties to introduce friends and neighbors to OPAL and its work. “I was so thrilled when Helen Bee called and invited me to serve on the committee,” said Penny. “I knew from my first touch with OPAL that this was something I wanted to be involved in.”

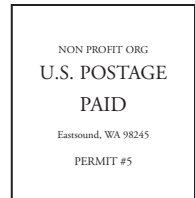
They got “hooked” on OPAL at the auction in 2006. “When Lisa spoke at the auction, it just made sense to me,” explained Penny. “It was exciting to find that this small island community had figured out such an elegant solution to a pervasive and compelling problem.”

“It’s a fundamental need,” added Carl. “Owning your own home defines the ‘American Dream.’ It’s one of the most valuable assets on this island, and what’s remarkable here is the diversity, the natural diversity, that exists in OPAL neighborhoods. This is key to the vitality of a community.”

“What I find extraordinary,” reflected Penny, “is that OPAL is an organization that operates on gratitude, on every level. Gratitude is the key to abundance, and I’ve been blown away by the generosity of gratitude that OPAL bestows on the community, its homeowners and volunteers – and vice versa. I feel confident that this gratitude, the way OPAL operates, will ensure that there will always be adequate affordable housing on this island. As a member and volunteer, I’m committed to working toward that end.”



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#### SAVE THE DATES:

September 10, tour of Wild Rose Meadow, 5 to 7 p.m.

October 11, OPAL benefit auction and dinner, 5 to 9 p.m.



Photo by Steve Schiller

The new entrance at Wild Rose Meadow off Mt. Baker Road.

## Black & White Soirée

### SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2008

Please join us for OPAL's annual  
dinner and auction  
in the Orcas Center Madrona Room  
5:00 – 9:00 p.m.

our annual fundraising event in support of OPAL's work

Tickets \$90 each ✂ Table of 8 \$900

RSVP (360) 376-3191