

Happy 10 Year Anniversary, Island Community Center

ICC celebrates a decade as community hub

by Jessica Brophy

STONINGTON—In the early 2000s, when the push to build a new elementary school was forming, Bobbi Billings saw an opportunity.

“The town was going to be left with these buildings,” said Billings, referencing the

former Stonington school buildings. Billings said she and Kathie Keane talked about how the Island had always needed a place to socialize, exercise and hold community events. But where to house a center for activities?

“To me it was a no-brainer,” she continued. The kids were already hanging out there; the town would have the buildings, and there was a gym and spaces in the building for various activities.

It was especially important, said Billings, as many in Stonington were worried about losing the school and part of the town’s identity.

So, as committees were formed and designs were discussed for the new elementary school in Deer Isle, another committee was formed to found the Island Community Center, which opened in 2002.

Billings said the startup process involved many people “thinking outside the box and having a little faith.”

“It was a huge hurdle to get the building in shape,” said Pat Gross, Island Community Center’s executive director. One of the major fundraisers that got the community center on its feet was a truck raffle, where tickets were sold for \$100 apiece for a brand-new truck. The truck would then be purchased for the winner from Morrison Chevrolet with the funds from the raffle. As it turns out, Harlan Billings won the truck and gave the truck



Guests are surprised with balloons as the first community Café meal commences in May 2011, with dessert and a grab goodie bag. The Meals for Me program has become an ICC standby, serving fun with food to Island residents. Photo courtesy of Amanda Poyant



Congratulations Island Community Center on 10 GREAT years!

It has been a privilege to be a part of such an incredible organization, since its beginning. Here’s to many more years of success.

Bobbi Billings

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The Town of Deer Isle wishes the Island Community Center a great big congratulations on 10 wonderful years! Thank you!

The Norton Family sends 10th anniversary wishes to the Island Community Center!

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back to the community center, which meant that all \$30,000 that had been raised through the raffle could be kept for the center.

The strength of the community center is its diversity, said Billings. “Both towns are equally invested,” she said. Board members have included selectmen from both towns, student representatives from the schools, and residents of all ages and backgrounds.

“We’re a very functional board, with no hidden agendas,” said Billings. “What you see is what you get.”

The community center’s activities, too, are diverse. “We’ve offered everything from hunters safety classes to CPR training to Camp Kooky to Senior Card Sharks,” said Billings. Birthday parties, after-school programs, basketball, line dancing, Pilates, geo-caching, water and swim safety, Winter Walkers and Al-Anon meetings—you name it, it’s happened through the community center.

Even in a single summer’s day the diversity in the building is astounding, said Gross. Bone Builders exercise class, line dancing, *Continued on page 7*



From left, Sandy Buxton and Executive Director Pat Gross, at the Island Community Center Holiday Bazaar in December 2006. Penobscot Bay press file photo

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 the Island Food Pantry, Camp Kooky and the General Store, are all happening. People are in and out all day, and the entire building is used, said Gross.

"We're totally open to anyone using the center," said Gross. "We cater to the locals and do what we can to meet the needs of the community." Gross encourages people with ideas for activities or local groups to contact

her. "Sometimes things work, and sometimes they don't," she said.

The center has been especially helpful in offering seniors a place to socialize, with programs like Senior Card Sharks, Community Café and Bone Builders exercise classes. "There's people who have come here every week for 10 years to play cards," said Gross.

Gross said the constant challenge of the community center is the same one for any nonprofit—finances. Various fundraisers like the annual auction, the continuous bottle drive at Burnt Cove Market and the General Store help, as well as the "generous support" from the two towns, said Gross. The General Store has raised more than \$29,000 since it started, for example, and is supplied entirely by tax-deductible donations and offers affordable home goods to shoppers.

"We try to stretch our dollars as far as we can," said Billings, who praised volunteers for helping to keep costs down, and Gross, who "knows how to make a dollar work."

Billings called the community center "a true community, grassroots organization founded by people who believed in the community." She said the center works hard to make everything affordable and available

to all. One of the ways to do that, said Billings, is to continue to pursue partnerships with other community nonprofits. Swim lessons at the Lily Pond, for example, are cosponsored by Island Fishermen's Wives Association and Island Heritage Trust.

In the same vein, both Billings and Gross encourage community members to support the center through volunteering. "Everyone has something they can offer," said Billings. According to the ICC's report to the towns in 2011, more than 760 volunteer hours (meaning one volunteer for one hour) were logged at the center, with more than 78,900 use-hours in the center (one person for one hour) that year.

When asked what her future vision is for ICC, and what she'd like to see happen at the center, Billings said that while she would like to see a "clearer path to resources" and for the center to be more self-funded, she wants to see what's happening in the center now to continue.

"There's always a flurry of activity there," said Billings, who also hopes that Gross will still be bringing her "upbeat energy" to the job.

"ICC is community driven," said Billings. "If the public is using the center, that's all we can ask for."



If boredom has set in, take heart: there's plenty for kids to do at the Island Community Center. At top, children participate in gymnastics and cheering with instructor Larry Dutch in 2006. Above, the Camp Kooky class of 2005. Camp Kooky has become part of the Stonington summer for its younger residents. Penobscot Bay Press file photos



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CELEBRATE!
 Join the Island Community Center as we celebrate our 10th Anniversary with festivities and an auction, August 25-27.

- Saturday, 8/25 Community thank you cook out 2-5pm, bounce house, magician, free food and beverages at the ICC rain or shine
- Sunday, 8/26 Annual auction 2pm in the ICC gym
- Monday, 8/27 Food on the Stonington Fish Pier at 6pm, Flash in the Pans on the pier at 7pm and at 9pm FIREWORKS!!

ANY QUESTIONS? Call Pat 367-2735, Leslie 367-2342 or Bobbi 348-2264
 HOPE TO SEE YOU!