



Celebrating 25 years of community service

Angel Guild

A special tribute section of the Key Peninsula News

April, 2003

Design by Rodika Tollefson

Touching the community, one project at a time

By Rodika Tollefson

On Feb. 17, 1978, eight Key Peninsula women opened shop in a rundown shack in Home to help raise funds for the local health clinic. The thrift store took donations and sold the items at bargain prices. "If we made a dollar a day, we thought we were doing well," says one of the original store volunteers, Shirley Olson. "In the beginning, we had two ladies sorting outside in the cold, but we did OK."

In the following 25 years, the Angel Guild Thrift Shop would spread its wings to become a successful nonprofit business and donate close to half-million dollars to the local community.

The schools, the library, the fire department, the Civic Center, the food bank are among the dozens of organizations that have been touched by the Angels' generosity. To make those groups' dreams a reality, about 50 women spend countless hours sorting, folding, washing, ironing, cleaning, lifting and stocking the thrift store—not to mention serving smiles to customers.

"We never envisioned growing like this, but we were needed out here and people have supported us," says another original volunteer, Virginia Seavy.

Seavy and Olson, along with Mary Seidelman and Marge Radonich, are still active volunteers. Other women have come and gone—but many who join become hooked. "I really didn't know what the Angel Guild did, but I wanted to meet people," says Elsie Vezzani, who joined the guild more than seven years ago as a newcomer to the area. "You meet wonderful people and make great friends here."

Volunteers say they like the thrift shop because it's fun—for some it's a great place to "get out and meet people" at retirement. But being a volunteer is as much about commitment as it is about having fun. The work is physically demanding, as hundreds of bags must be meticulously sorted, items cleaned up, and shelves stocked.

The Angels may not brag about it much, but the efforts of their selfless dedication can be seen everywhere around the Key Peninsula. From the first \$1,000 check given to the health clinic in 1979, they never stopped giving. They have plenty to celebrate this month.



Photo by Rodika Tollefson

Angel Guild members include (left to right): Front row, Maryann Stafford, Pat Kunzi, Diana Home, Bea Gomsrud, Anne Erwin; second row, Mary Krumbein, Ann Larson, Virginia Seavy, Shirley Olson, Linda Armour, Elsie Vezzani; third row, Nel Blanchard, Carol Sudder, Nancy Korseck, Mary Ramsdell, Marlene Youso, Cecilia Long, Marlene Mile, Kae Thompson, Frankie Johnson, Betty Lee; fourth row, Lee Stiles, Bonnie Stinson, Leona Britt, Virda Lawrence, Beverly Jacobs, Pearlita McColley, Marianne McColley, Joan Snyder. Not pictured: Sandi Adam, Betty Barkubein, Brenda Bates, Betty Beal, Joyce Bischoff, Barbara Bramhall, Charal Cowsert, Lou Dalton, Toni Jacobsen, Mary Lonning, Rose Malmgren, Marge Radonich, Joy Rakes, Gerry Reeder, Connie Riche, Jeanne Seick, Mary Seidelman, Georgia Steele, Vicki Swenning, Dawn Trueblood, and Ole McDowell.

The Angels among us

By Hugh McMillan

In early 1980, I became involved with the KP Fire Department and, thereafter, chair of its annual 4th of July fireworks display on Von Geldern Cove by volunteer firefighter certified pyrotechnicians. The fireworks show became a fundraiser. Those were the days when the department was almost all volunteer and had very little by way of financial resources.

We desperately needed a fully certified air compressor to fill our air bottles for firefighting and training; at the time we had to drive our supply bottles into Tacoma for refilling at \$6 per bottle.

We had "firecracker" collection containers (made from the core rollers for carpeting) all over the peninsula at local businesses. Some miscreants ran off with a few of these, but we did col-

lect a fairly good sum of money.

It was not nearly enough to pay for the compressor and its complex filtration systems to provide safe air for our firefighters.

I got a call from a Guild member, Shirl' Olson. "How's the fundraiser going?"

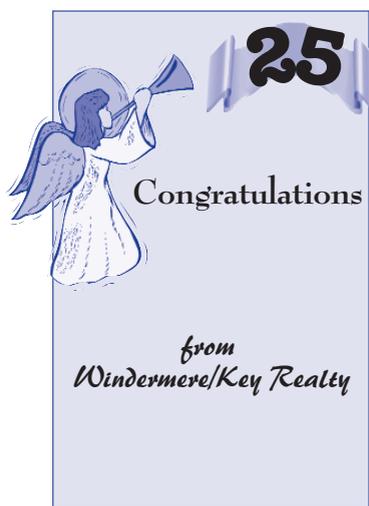
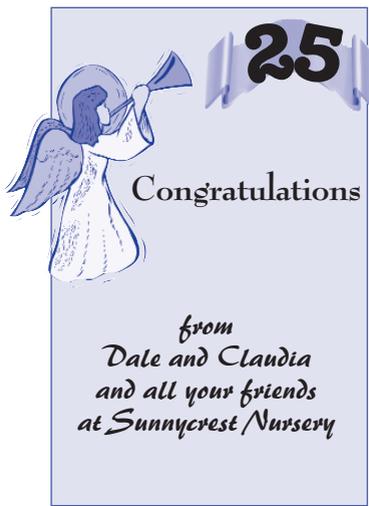
"Could be a lot better."

"How much do you need?"

The needed money came immediately. No one from the media was there to cover the Chief accepting the check - which was for a couple-thousand dollars. The Guild just quietly went about its business.



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The business of thrift store

Story and photos by Rodika Tollefson

The Angel Guild Thrift Shop may be a good place to socialize, but members say the organization is more a business than it is a social group. Looking at their tremendous success, no one would doubt that statement. It takes about 200 hours of work per week on the premises and at members' homes—the equivalent of five full-time employees.

Department heads are assigned to various areas, such as toys, books, jewelry, men's clothes and so on. Within each department, countless hours go into preparing the merchandise for sale. Toy pieces are counted and cleaned; fabric is measured, ironed and neatly folded; clothes are carefully inspected for tears, stains or missing buttons; electrical appliances are tested. For testing and other handy purposes like assembly, husbands are often recruited.

"Everything we put in the store has to be in top condition," says volunteer Elsie Vezzani. "We have enough to choose from that we can offer top quality, and our customers expect that." Items that cannot be used at the shop are often "recycled," sent to Value Village, Boys and Girls Club, shelters or other organizations looking for donations.

In the store, stockers replenish merchandise weekly or as needed, pricing the items. During store hours, two clerks usually work each three-hour shift. They are trained to run the register, help customers and keep the store clean.

In its 25 years, the shop changed locations a few times, with the help of local businesses and residents. Gone are the days when sorting was done on the dirt floor and every donation went on sale. The business has steadily grown. A part-time manager now keeps things in check.

The spirit of these tireless women has remained a constant through the good times and the bad. "It's hard work. It really is," says one of the founders, Virginia Seavy. "It's very satisfying, to see the good we've done."

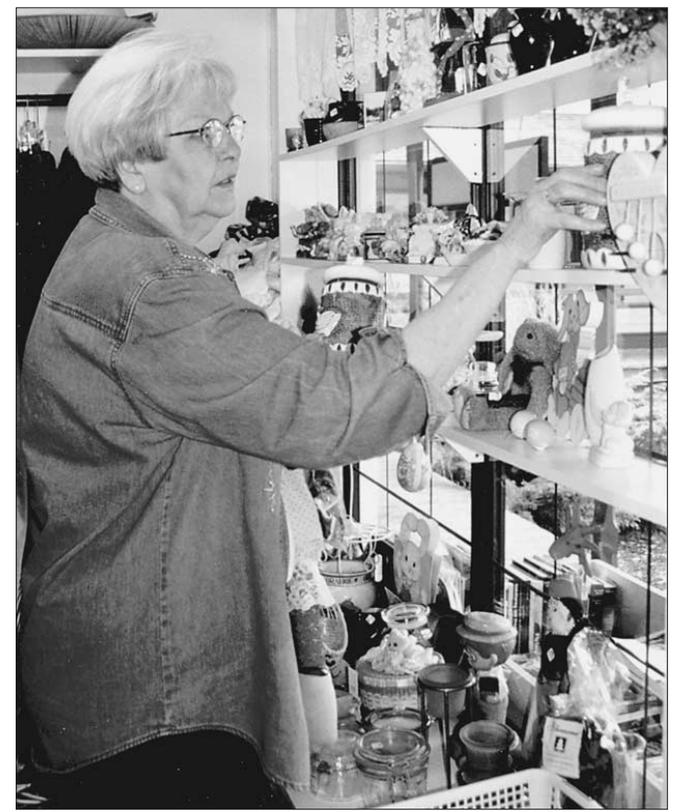
The success didn't come without challenges. The store has been broken in a few times. Garbage is being dropped off at the site. Some donations are in such poor shape that they head right for the dumpster. Garbage fees, in fact, are a big expense for the guild.

Nonetheless, the members are grateful for the donations that pour in.

"The nicer the merchandise, the more money we can make," Vezzani says. "The more money we make, the more we give back to the community."

And for the community, it's a double win: bargain shopping and support for local programs.

Sorting, folding, cleaning—and yes, socializing—keeps the Guild volunteers busy. A handful of women spend four to five hours each Tuesday and throughout the week, getting merchandise ready or stocking the store. Virginia Seavy (below, center) has been dedicated to the organization since its inception, and continues to volunteer every week. "I have done all the jobs," she says. "I am amazed at the job we do and the money we give out." Also pictured are Cecilia Long and Toni Jacobsen. The store merchandise keeps up with the seasons. Right, Joan Snyder organizes an Easter display.





Celebrating success

The Angel Guild will celebrate its 25th anniversary in April. A special meeting and luncheon will be held on April 28 at 11 a.m., and all former members are invited to join in. The small business meeting will be followed by a style show where members demonstrate clothes they bought at the thrift store, a potluck and swearing in of new members. The anniversary party committee Chair Dianna Home and committee members Elsie Vezzani and Virginia Seavy are planning the celebration.

The store will be festively decorated during the month. To celebrate, the Guild will give away four gift certificates. Entry forms are available at the store.

How you can help the Guild continue to serve our community:

Become a member and volunteering your time at the store

Donate high-quality items

Shop at the store and enjoying the bargains!

The store, located in the K.C. Corral at 9013 Key Peninsula Highway North in Key Center, is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The store offers clothing, toys, books, domestics, shoes, jewelry, housewares, knick-knacks and more. Donations are accepted Monday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Donations are tax-deductible. Call the store at 884-9333 for information.

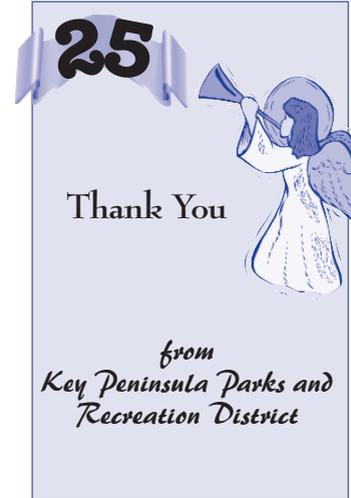


Above: The shop's humble beginning was a rundown shack in Home. Pictured in front of the store in 1978 are Marge Radonich (still a member today) and Mary Ann Borcher. The building is still standing.

Right: Marianne McColley helps a shopper.



Photo courtesy of Angel Guild



Guild facts

-The Guild has 50 members. Many are retired; however, the group has younger members as well. Adults of all ages are encourage to join.

-To be a member, the person must work 12 hours per month, pay \$1 dues and attend at least six meetings a year. Ability to perform physical work may be required.

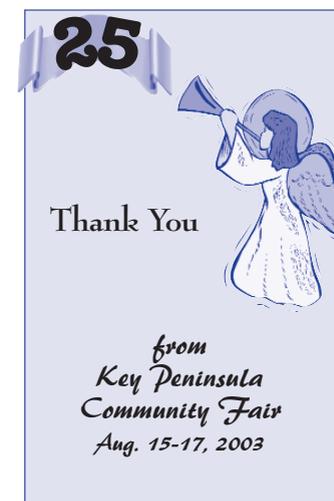
-Of the \$480,000+ donated to date, nearly half was donated in the last five years.

-To apply for a grant, the organization must write a letter explaining the request. Grants are not given directly to individuals.



Photos by Rodika Tollefson

Right: The Koseo family shops at the Angel Guild often for gifts and clothes. At \$3 for jeans and \$1.50 for shoes, prices are hard to beat.



The Guild was born to help health clinic in Home

By Colleen Slater



Photo courtesy of Angel Guild

Treasurer Diana Thompson presents the Guild's first check to clinic Director Jeanne Brodsack. The check, dated Jan. 2, 1979, was in the amount of \$1,000. A party marked the occasion.

here part of the week. She brought supplies for the clinic from Tacoma, using her small salary from Jefferson House Nursing Center to buy them.

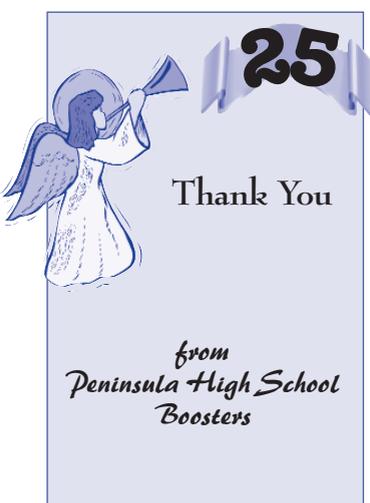
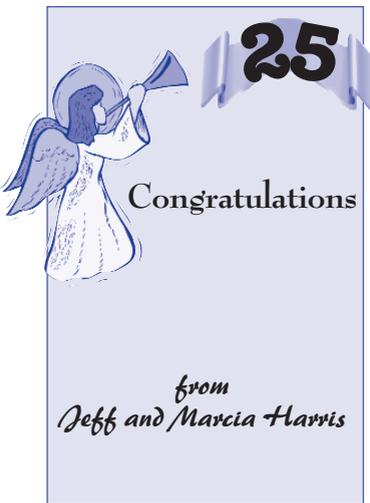
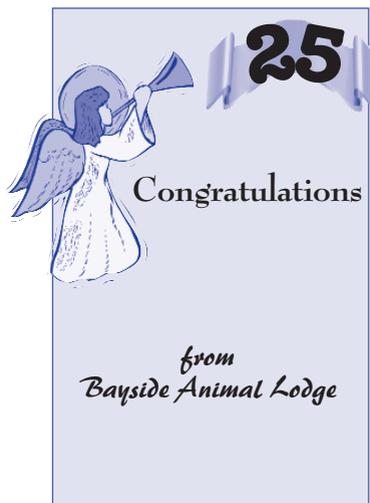
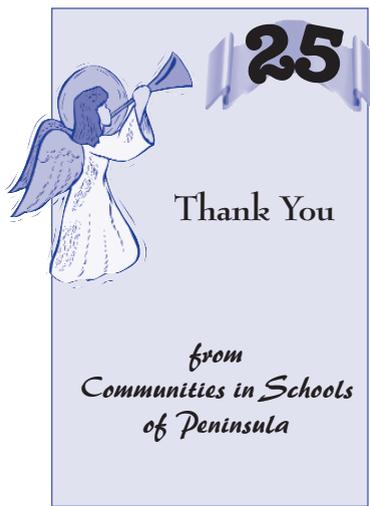
The couple eventually moved to the Key Peninsula, to a 3.2-acre property with a little house sliding off its foundation, and 32 dead cars left behind.

It was largely due to Brodsack's efforts that the clinic was able to open and operate, although funding was tough. "Though keeping the Clinic doors open has been much like a roller coaster, her smile and optimism has persevered, bolstering lagging

spirits and spreading hope and faith," was written about her in the Key Peninsula Newsletter in August 1979, when she retired from the clinic.

Although no longer involved with the Angel Guild, she's enjoyed watching it grow. "Those running it have shaped it," she said. "The spirit of the volunteers and the quality of material they offer make it what it is today. The Guild is a good place for newcomers to get acquainted."

She believes the attitude of volunteers is what should be taught to the next generations being involved in a worthwhile venture.



The Angel Guild grew its wings as a fundraiser for the Key Peninsula Health Center. Operated with the help of volunteers, the clinic had a few paid medical employees, and as many as 100 patients a week.

"My first patient was a cat," tells Jeanne Brodsack with a twinkle. The people who were interested in a medical clinic for the Key Peninsula were gathered for their first official meeting, including two doctors from Gig Harbor. Mrs. Ferguson brought her cat, who wasn't well. "So I treated it right there. My first clinic patient," Brodsack said. The clinic, the only health service on the peninsula, opened its doors in 1972 with donations and volunteer staff.

Jeanne, the clinic's director, was a licensed nurse. Although a newcomer to the area, she was eager to work with others to help bring a dream to reality.

"The clinic built itself," she said, recalling the uncounted hours of those early volunteers. "It started with an idea ... and good fortune helped us grow."

Their first fundraiser was a spaghetti dinner at the Civic Center. They asked for free will donations rather than \$2 tickets, and took in nearly \$2,000 instead of \$600, thanks to the generous hearts of community members.

Jeanne and Don Brodsack lived in Tacoma, with the youngest of six children still at home in 1968 when the idea of the clinic was formed. Jeanne lived

In their own words...

Times are tough for many people these days. It is our job at KPCS to give a helping hand. Our job is made easier by the "Angels in our pockets." Because of Angel Guild's monthly donation, we can assist more families with emergency shelter, utility and prescription needs.

With smiles on their faces and goodness in their hearts, the Angels are a true blessing for us as a community. Thank you, ladies, for all you do.

Cristi Watson, Key Peninsula Community Services

For two decades, the Angel Guild has graciously provided funds to the Key Center Library, supplementing the Pierce County Library's and Friends of the Key Center Library's budgets. Books, equipment, programs, furniture, the bench on the front porch, and most recently the "Balancing the Books" sculpture project are among the many gifts. The donation for the sculpture project was substantial.

The staff, the Friends, and the library community are grateful to the Angel Guild for so generously supporting the library, and many worthy causes in our community. Kudos and thanks to the Angel Guild!

Dory Myers, Key Center Library

I am always overwhelmed and delighted when I hear of yet another generous contribution that the Key Peninsula Angel Guild has made.

Angel Guild grants support The Reading Is Fundamental program at Evergreen Elementary.

They do amazing work and give so much to this community.

Evergreen Elementary has been the recipient of grants to support our Reading Is Fundamental Program for several years. The RIF Day program is a national reading program that receives federal funding and must get matching community funding. Three times a year a special RIF Day celebration is held at Evergreen. Every student at Evergreen and Evergreen's ECEAP and pre-school students choose a free book. Thanks to the Angel Guild's annual support, Evergreen is able to give away 975 books each school year.

Key Peninsula Angel Guild, you truly are Evergreen's angels.

Sabra Stratford, Evergreen Elementary RIF Day Coordinator



Photo courtesy of Evergreen Elementary

Angels, from front page

The following year, then Chief Horace Kanno decided against my best advice – and at the time I was a Fire Commissioner, technically, one of his bosses – that we should, as he put it, "go for broke" and purchase of a Lifepack-5, a defibrillator.

"Impossible!" I insisted. "The thing comes in at \$8,500-plus!"

Kanno prevailed.

We worked our tails off trying to convince the public that it should support this effort for the life-saving device. Some did. Many did not.

Guild member Loretta Jewett called. "How much do you need?"

"You don't want to know."

"How much?"

"Hold your hat! Five thousand dollars."

"I'll call you back."

She did. Within a few hours. "To whom do we make out the check?"

With that, and a lot of political arm twisting, the Key Peninsula Fire Department became the first fire department in Pierce County – probably in the state – to have its EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians) trained, certified, and authorized to perform the life-saving defibrillation operation on our patients.

We had a pretty good argument: We're at least 45 minutes from the nearest hospital.

There are those who claim the Angels "walk on water." I, for one, have never seen them do that. But I have absolute faith that they do and often.

They just don't brag about it.