

## John's Island Service League raises \$450,000 to aid those struggling during COVID-19 pandemic

By Knowhere  
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Hope Woodhouse, left, with former John's Island Community Service League presidents Pat Thompson and Marlynn Scully, Photo courtesy of the John's Island Community Service Lea...

Some of the most well-to-do in Indian River County have stepped up their generosity toward the community's most unfortunate during the economic uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to donating more than \$1 million to 40 nonprofit agencies in this year's philanthropy program, the [John's Island Community Service League](#) (JICSL) donated an additional \$250,000 to the [United Way of Indian River County's](#) COVID-19 Response Fund.

The JICSL donated \$50,000 in March, and in April donated \$200,000 more in the form of a matching grant which precipitated \$200,000 in additional donations from individuals and businesses outside the John's Island community.

Most of the money has been distributed by the United Way IRC to help families with food, rent and utilities, said Hope Woodhouse, JICSL's ex-officio and a former president of the organization. Woodhouse also is a director on the United Way IRC board, so she saw the need for assistance first-hand, she said.

"We're really happy that we've been able to raise this money to help those in need in the community," Woodhouse said. JICSL's needs committee has determined that 11% of the population in Indian River County are below the poverty level, but more than 40% are within one or two paychecks away from poverty level.

"This crisis has brought that statistic home in a very real way," she said. With so many people employed in the service industry, and with the pandemic hitting at the height of tourist season, the shut-down has been extra difficult for Indian River County residents, Woodhouse said. Salaries also are lower here than they are elsewhere in Florida, she said.

JICSL raises most of its money from donations from the community's residents, from business sponsors, and from an annual gala event. This year's event was to be a concert by Killer Queen – considered by many to be the best tribute band for the 1970s British rock group. But then came the state shelter-in-place Executive Order, and the event had to be canceled, Woodhouse said. "But pretty much everyone insisted that we keep the ticket money, anyway," she said.

Instead of hitting up the John's Island community again for additional COVID-19 rescue funding, they decided to create the matching grant. The additional \$200,000 was raised in less than three weeks, Woodhouse said. Since the United Way IRC is underwriting the administrative costs of distributing the funding, 100% of it will reach the agencies that need it, she said.

The JICSL has raised more than \$14 million for local nonprofit agencies since it was formed in 1980 and is in the process of completing this year's needs assessment, which will give the group a clear picture of just how the pandemic has affected the county's vulnerable population, Woodhouse said.

They also are working with [Treasure Coast Homeless Services Council \(TCHSC\)](#) to prepare for a surge of new cases of homelessness due to the pandemic.

"We are evaluating funding of an additional staff position at TCHSC that will oversee the disbursement of federal, state and nonprofit funding that will be made available to the agency as a result of the pandemic," Woodhouse said. The group also hopes to organize a group of attorneys to provide pro bono services to TCHSC as they help people restructure their mortgages and leases.