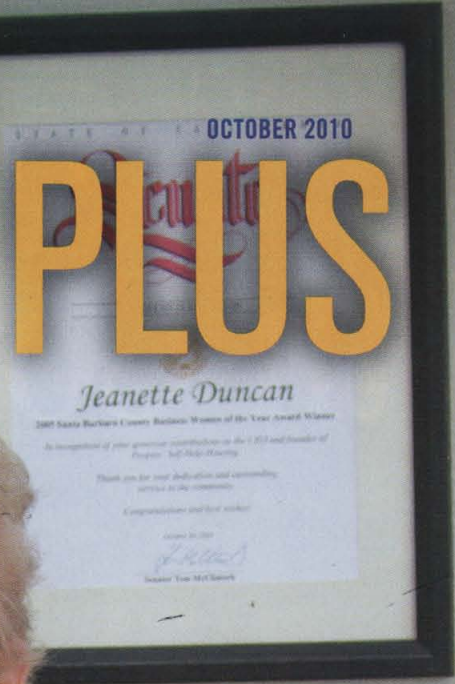


Journal PLUS

MAGAZINE OF THE CENTRAL COAST



PEOPLE'S SELF HELP HOUSING TURNS 40



Executive Director,
Jeanette Duncan



JEANETTE DUNCAN PEOPLES' SELF HELP HOUSING OPENING DOORS FOR 40 YEARS

By Susan Stewart

French insurance company. During her ten years in Europe, Duncan became fluent in French and German, and met and married Donald "Corky" Duncan. A command in Donald's military career transferred the couple to America, specifically the Central Coast, where they have lived for more than 43 years.

It was while earning her second degree, this time in Sociology with a minor in Business, that Duncan first heard of the effort to provide more affordable housing in our county.

"I was very interested in social services, and I met a VISTA volunteer who had worked in Washington, D.C." she said. "He asked me if I thought affordable housing was an issue here, and if I did, would I help him form an organization. ... They incorporated in 1970, and I became a board member." Duncan was asked to step into the lead position as executive director in 1976.

Since that time, Peoples' Self-Help Housing has grown by leaps and bounds, becoming one of the most respected non-profits in the country. Under Duncan's visionary leadership, PSHH has constructed over 1200 owner-built, single-family homes, most with "sweat-equity," and has developed more than 1400 rental units for seniors, farmworkers, low-income families, and the physically challenged across three counties: San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura.

Duncan's mother, Fern, set high standards for her daughter, winning a prestigious state award for the thousands of hours she gave to her community as a local hospital volunteer. Fern shared her generous community spirit with her nine siblings, all of whom grew up to be what Duncan describes as "... very giving; helping others was important to all of them."

Without hesitation, however, Duncan names her grandmother Mary as being her strongest influence. Born to Scottish immigrants in a sod house in Kansas, Mary was one of the few women of her era and working class

social standing to receive a high school education. Mary and her husband homesteaded in Hydro, Oklahoma, near the Texas border, where she bore all 10 of her children at home, without the aid of running water or electricity. Well-read, with a talent for business, Mary not only nurtured her 10 children, but also managed the household money, raised chickens, and sold eggs – all while fighting for the woman's right to vote. Mary was a pioneer and a suffragette, who lived to see her dream of voting realized; and from that day forward, never missed her chance to vote in every election.

"How she got involved in the right to vote, I don't know," said Duncan. "But she took that right very seriously; and social justice was also very important to her."

That "gene" is alive and well in her granddaughter, who—despite the success of PSHH— recognized that a roof over one's head is sometimes not enough; that children from hard-working families can fall behind

LIKE SO MANY WOMEN OF HIGH achievement, Jeanette Duncan points to the women who came before her as role models for a life well-led. As she prepares to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Peoples' Self-Help Housing, Duncan recalls the inspiration for the almost equal number of years she has spent at its helm.

Born and raised in Oklahoma City, Duncan earned the first of two college and university degrees by the time she was 20. Upon graduation, a case of wanderlust took her to Europe, where she worked first for the European Exchange System, and then for a

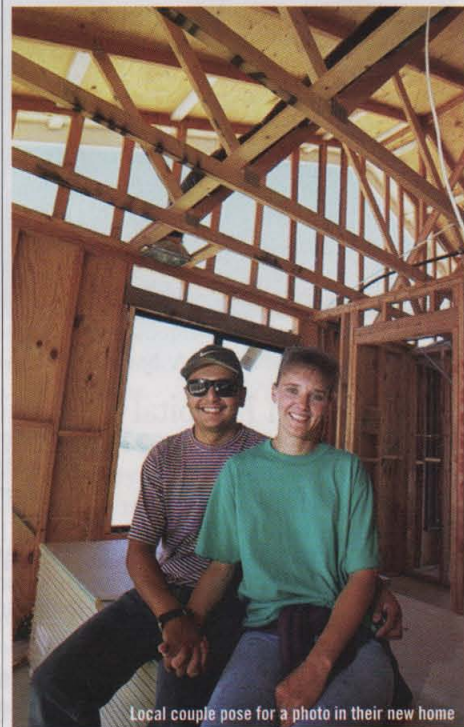
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Local couple pose for a photo in their new home



in school. So nine years ago, the Youth Education Enhancement Program (YEEP) was formed. The largest YEEP center is located in Paso Robles, but there are four others in Santa Barbara County. The program offers free after-school help with literacy, English, and math skills, striving to improve grade point averages, sharpen study skills, and promote high school graduation and continued education.

"So many children with working parents are struggling," she said, "especially if English is not their first language ... Our goal is that every one of them gets to college. And we now have social workers on staff to help families and seniors in our supportive housing program."

In the 1980s, the long waiting list for houses prompted PSHH to add rental apartments and residential hotels at affordable prices to their services, in order to serve working people, seniors, and people with special needs, such as disabled veterans, and those with mental or physical challenges.

Even after 40 years, Duncan says her best days are the ones where she sees a family get the keys to their first home; or a roomful of children bent over their schoolwork at one of the YEEP centers. Duncan does not speak of retirement; instead she talks about all that's left to accomplish: more funds for more after-school programs, and more services for the special needs community.

The public has been offered a unique chance to help Jeanette Duncan and the staff at PSHH continue its remarkable work. Three events called "Taste of Hope" have been planned to celebrate its 40th anniversary, and the proceeds from these will benefit PSHH and YEEP.

"People up and down the coast have been so good to us," Duncan explained. "So we're having three events to give them all a chance to celebrate and be thanked."

On Sunday, October 3 at 3:00 p.m., a buffet dinner and local wines will be served at the Rubin Estate in Santa Barbara, a turn-of-the-century home near the Mission. On Saturday, October 23 at 5:30 p.m., The Edwards Barn in Nipomo will serve dinner, featuring live and silent auctions, plus the music of Louie Ortega & Amigos. And on Saturday, November 6 at 5:30 p.m., a silent auction, music, and dinner will be held at the Niner Winery in Paso Robles. Tickets for each of the three are \$100. Call 781-3088 or visit pshhc.org for details.

"We are especially proud to have celebrity Co-Chairs Rona Barrett and Steve Ford on hand for these special events," said Duncan.

Individual donors and businesses alike have contributed generously to the success of Peoples' Self-Help Housing. Duncan plans to honor them at these Taste of Hope celebrations. Among the honorees are Community Partners of the Year, Donor of the Year, Foundations of the Year, Professionals of the Year, and Volunteers of the Year.

In the meantime, the foundations are being laid, the walls are being framed, and the lights are being turned on at countless new homes across the Central Coast—homes that provide the fundamental stability people need to thrive and be productive. "If you care about community," says Duncan, "then volunteer time or contribute. This is such a great way to get involved."

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