



Summer Newsletter

2023

OJAI WOMEN'S FUND



Membership Update
from Gayle Whitaker
and
Donna Freiermuth

Thanks for Your Support!

"Eighty percent of success is showing up."

Woody Allen

Our membership drive was successful once again, thanks to all of you. We must admit an earlier start time for the campaign seemed a little risky, but it was a risk we were willing to take. **Thank you all** for showing up and giving generously to your group and as an individual member. We also appreciate those who donated a little extra to help with the smooth running of this organization.

We are in the final stages of placing new members in groups, combining groups that have lost members but still want to exist, and ensuring all our groups can vote in September.

The Grants Committee thanks us most gratefully, as they can now have a firm money figure in mind when they start promising grant money. We have surpassed our numbers from 2022.

To be eligible to vote on this year's grantee ballot, renew your membership or join before July 31.

New OWF Member? Come Celebrate with Us!

The Ojai Women's Fund Membership Committee welcomes all our new members joining this year to an orientation meeting on August 15 from 5-6:30 PM. Interested in knowing more about the organization you joined? Come to our "work party" and meet our Steering Committee and others who help to make the Ojai Women's Fund successful. We are a friendly bunch and always encourage any of our members to join a committee to get more involved. And, as was mentioned, it is a party to celebrate YOU. An email invitation will be coming soon with the address and directions. So, please plan to come!



Your Grants Committee is Busy, Busy, Busy!



(Polly Nelson, left, and Catherine Meek, Grants Co-chairs)

The most exciting and rewarding part of the OWF year is in high gear. The Grants Committee has received 27 grant applications from qualified nonprofit organizations serving the Ojai Valley. A total of 25 volunteers on five research teams are reviewing applications falling within OWF's five focus areas: Arts, Education, Environment, Health, and Social Services. Site visits will take place in the coming weeks. The Grants Committee's recommendations for finalists for the ballot will be submitted, and then **YOU** come in.

The Joy of Local Giving

Voting for Grants by Individual Members and Giving Circles

September 9-25, 2023

Remember, the Ojai Women's Fund welcomes new and renewing members year-round. But hurry! To be eligible to vote in this grant cycle, be sure to join or renew your membership by July 31, [by clicking here](#).

2023 Ballot Presentation — September 6, 2023

All individual and group voting members are welcome. Invitation to follow.



Vote Now for Best of Ojai Valley 2023

Let's make it three in a row! Make OWF a winner for a third year running! Click to vote today.



CASITASROWING

EST. 2008



Wendy Gillett, Executive Director and Coach of Summer Rowing Camp, Lake Casita's Rowing Association

As you can see in the photo, Wendy takes her work seriously because she has so much passion for the people that row at Lake Casitas. She actively engages with all middle and high schools in the Ojai Valley to ensure a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse Summer Rowing Camp. She works year-round with her

husband, Eric Gillett (it was love at first sight when they met at age 18), who is a former US National Rowing Team rower. They started Lake Casita's Rowing Association 15 years ago and haven't stopped rowing. She says, "We're exhausted but happy." They have about 150 members, including adult teams, kid's teams, and an adaptive team (pictured in the middle of the photo above is Jason Johnson, and to the right is Eric Gillett) and eight coaches on staff plus two doing adaptive teams. Wendy is unbiased when saying, "We have the best kids. You'd love them. And I'm sometimes taken aback by how nice they can be to each other."

Lake Casita's rowing club is diverse in reaching out to underserved communities and as a program overall. Wendy is so proud since their program was chosen as one of 25 nationwide clubs to be a STEM. STEM stands for science, technology, engineering, and math. It's a philosophy of education that encourages curiosity and embraces teaching content and skills in a way that resembles real life. Rowing is one of those experiences.

The program is taught through an after-school program at DATA Middle School, where there were two field trips to Lake Casita to teach the kids all about rowing.

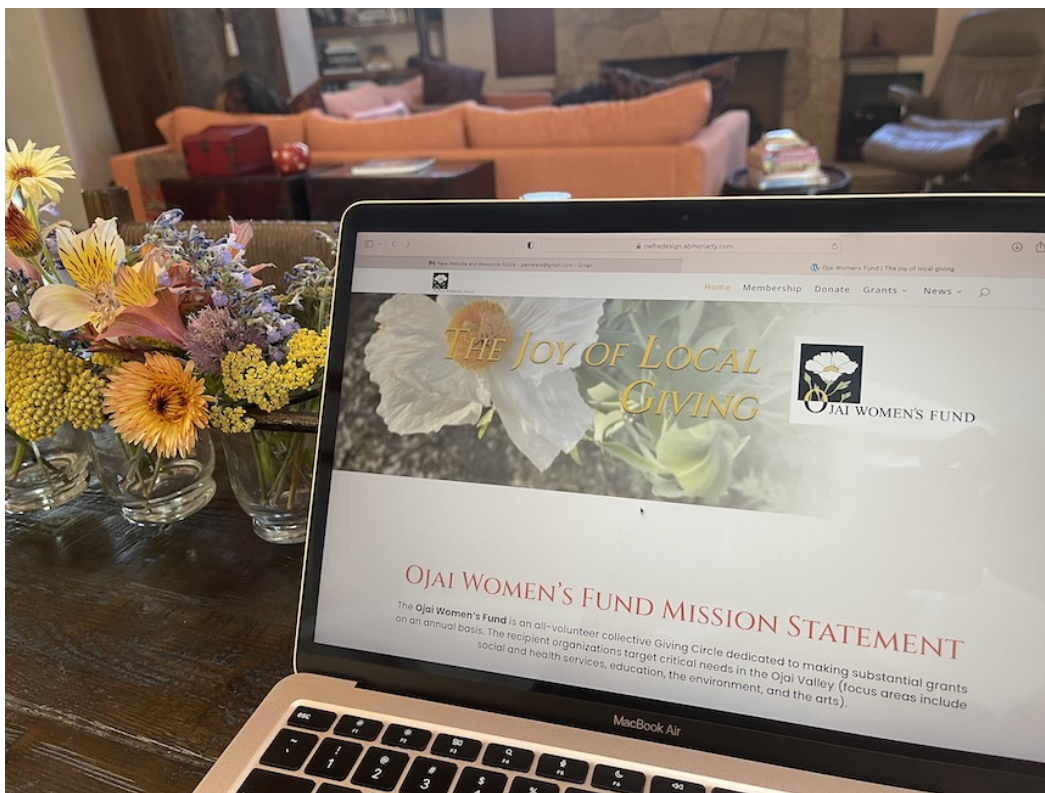
Another low-key but essential part of the program is food. They discovered that nutrition is a barrier. Wendy explains, "For many kids, even kids from an area where you wouldn't expect it - maybe they have two working parents that just don't have time to shop. So, we provide snacks twice a week and take apple or peanut butter packets to go with them. We encourage them to take it home to their siblings and put it in their bag for later."

She's also partnered with the YMCA to teach swimming. Another area she's most proud of is being approved for PE credits for Ojai Unified School District. That means their rowing team will get PE class credits from their school.

OWF members can experience the thrill of rowing, even vicariously, by attending one of their open houses. You can even try rowing for free. Members can experience Wendy's passion for her sport and, more importantly, the care and feeding of her "kids." You will never think of rowing as just a sport again. It is a comprehensive program where our youth can learn responsibility, teamwork, decision making, and accountability.

OWF will feature more grantees in future communications.

A new OWF website is coming in August!



The beautiful home page of the soon-to-launch new OWF website.

The new Ojai Women's Fund website will launch in early August. We've learned so much in our seven years of operation and want our website to reflect it. The site will deliver more information in easy-to-access formats like pop-up windows where critical pages can be printed or downloaded.

We have streamlined the membership process beginning with the 2024 grant year. Changes to the Santa Barbara Foundation pages make it quicker and easier to pay for memberships and donate. Check out the improved options if you want to donate or volunteer.

After the newsletter is sent out, our website will feed individual stories through our new blog with entries twice or thrice a month and then migrate to Facebook and Instagram. This should bring more exposure to OWF and, hopefully, more new members.

We want to thank all of the committee chairs who worked on new forms and multiple reviews of pages. We could not have done this without their input and support, and not to forget Margo Haas and Susan Weaver's many thoughts and suggestions. We could not have even started without the generous contributions of Phil Caruthers, Fred Rothenberg, Jacqueline Sherman, Jenny Taft, and Joann Yarbof.

It's been seven months of work, but we are very excited by the results. We hope you find it easy to use and refer your friends to join us.

With great excitement,

JJ Jones and Kathleen Kaiser, Communications and Marketing Co-chairs



This ongoing series introduces two more dynamic women new to leadership roles on this year's OWF Steering Committee. Today's Steering Committee has grown to eighteen women. These women have been role models and leaders, helping to further one of OWF's stated goals—to train leaders in Ojai's philanthropic community. The role of these leaders is to develop and disseminate OWF vision, policies, strategies, and actions to members and the public, decide on issues by consensus, develop and maintain the master OWF planning calendar, and determine the size of the annual grants funding pool. [Here's a link to the 2023 Steering Committee members and the roles in which they serve.](#)



Jenny Taft, Co-Chair Education & Events Committee

"Local knowledge" is Jenny Taft's middle name. She is part of the fifth of six generations of the Taft family presence in Ventura County. Her mom was from Santa Barbara, and Jenny was born there, but she has



Kathleen Kaiser, Co-Chair, Communications and Marketing Committee

Beginning as a music journalist turned publicist, Kathleen Kaiser has forged a career spanning forty-plus years of involvement in the most exciting industries of her

been embedded in the Ojai community for nearly her entire life. She grew up in Upper Ojai and attended Nordhoff High School. "Ojai was a simple bedroom community with a mix of hippies, second and third-generation blue-collar workers, farmers, and others who loved the simple life. Change is inevitable; for Ojai, the 1980s brought that change, with more affluence and changing ideas about the community's future.

"Some longtime residents felt that their core values were threatened, and that conversation continues to this day," says Jenny. She hopes that Ojai Women's Fund and other like-minded organizations can be a bridge to connecting people and fostering understanding and tolerance. We already have the structure to do this – giving circles that encourage friendship and trust, curiosity, an organized way to gain knowledge about community needs, and intention to help meet those needs."

Philanthropy is part of the family's DNA, especially conservation philanthropy, like Taft Gardens. During a ten-year stint in Cape Town, South Africa, Jenny supported anti-poaching activities and wildlife preservation. There, she also joined the Cape Town International Women's Club, a social and philanthropic group of over 600 women, two-thirds from other countries and one-third from South Africa. Like OWF, Jenny says this was an "instant friendship circle for people like me who didn't know a soul."

generation. From rock and roll in the late 60s and 70s to the digital/internet revolution of the late 80s, 90s, and 00s, she has been a marketing professional for Fortune 100 companies and small startups and produced conferences/tradeshows worldwide. Over her career, Kathleen published articles throughout the United States, Japan, the UK, and Italy. In addition, she has five published books, four on the music industry, one novel, and several plays.

In 1993, she opened Kathleen Kaiser & Associates (KKA), an emerging technology-marketing firm, which now focuses on working with the nonprofit arts and literary communities. She produced the 805 Writers Conference from 2011-2022 and is an advisor for the Women in Leadership Executive Program at the UC Santa Barbara PaCE. In addition, she currently sits on the boards of the Independent Writers of Southern California and the Writers & Publishers Network, a national literary nonprofit, along with the Ojai Women's Fund Steering Committee.

In 2002, Kathleen joined Ojai Shakespeare to help with marketing. She became president the following year, which entailed producing the summer season plus managing all marketing and sponsorship programs for five years.

Through her company, she managed marketing and sponsorship sales for the Ojai Art Stroll, handled marketing communication for Ojai Studio

Upon returning to the U.S., Jenny had two retail stores, Chameleon (shoes and clothing), for ten years in Ojai's downtown Arcade. She was also active on the Santa Barbara Girls' Inc. Committee for a few years.

Karen Evenden was a longtime neighbor in Upper Ojai and used her now legendary persuasive powers to recruit Jenny to OWF and leadership. Says Jenny, "I realized I need OWF, and they need me!"

As co-chair of the Events & Education committee, Jenny sees an opportunity to amplify efforts to educate and inspire members and anyone in the public about OWF and what we do.

OWF offers opportunities to do more than write a check. Our founders envisioned an organization that could identify and help meet the needs. They didn't want people to be pressured to keep donating and donating. The formula: One check in a year, a built-in giving circle to form bonds, and plenty of opportunities to give more in time, if available.

Jenny's daughter, Alexandra, and niece, Jaide Whitman, are part of the sixth generation of Taft family community engagement efforts. As they take the reins at Taft Gardens, Jenny says we have some things to learn from them and others in their generation. They have helped her stay keenly aware that we must consciously reach out to the next generation in our community. Those in their generation have ideas and energy and want to be closely involved with the nonprofits that are funded by OWF, as well as

Artists for four years, facilitated a strategic planning retreat for Performances to Grow On, publicity for the Humane Society of Ventura County, Kingsmen Shakespeare Festival, and was president of the Ventura County Writers Club for two years.

After her mother's passing, Kathleen bought a small home in Ojai and jumped into the community. In 2011 and 2012, KKA handled sponsorship sales for the Ojai Wine Festival. In 2011, she and legendary editor Shelly Lowenkopf created the Pacific Institute for Professional Writing (PIPW). She managed the annual Ventura County Book & Author Fair for PIPW. In 2015, the event expanded into the 805 Writers' Conference and moved to Ventura, California. In addition, she worked on Ojai WordFest, producing educational seminars and a full day at Libbey Bowl. Richard Camp talked her into taking over marketing for the Ojai Art Center Theater for two years before she left and joined the board of Joan Kemper's Ojai Performing Arts Theater.

Named Publicist of the Year in 2016 by the Book Publicists of Southern California for her contributions to the literary community, Kathleen maintains a small list of authors/clients that allow her to continue her volunteerism. She is president of the national literary nonprofit Writers & Publishers Network (WPN) and organizes quarterly meetings with speakers on Zoom, co-sponsored by IWOSC. In addition, she produces webinars for WPN and launched a podcast –

those that aren't. Jenny thinks our outreach through social media is an opportunity to magnify OWFs work, stay relevant, and reach people's hearts.

"There is so much need. We must help if we can. The world needs us to take action!" This is Jenny's mantra, expressed in many different ways in our conversation. If chatting with Jenny Taft for 30 minutes doesn't get you fired up, nothing will!

Talking Book Publishing with Kathleen Kaiser – in March 2021.

"I joined the Ojai Women's Fund Steering Committee in 2018 but became too sick from the effects of the Thomas Fire and had to resign. I'm thrilled to be back working with this incredible team of women, especially my co-chair JJ Jones." In her free time, Kathleen works on another historical novel and writes articles for regional publications. She is a proud fourth-generation small businesswoman.



August 15 – New Member Orientation (steering committee and new members only)

September 6 – 2023 Ballot Presentation (members only)

September 9-25 – Voting for grantees (members only)

November 9 – Grantee Celebration – Ojai Woman's Club (Members and grantee guests only)

Ojai Women's Fund

PO Box 310
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OJAI WOMEN'S FUND