Last Call: A Star Steward Bids Farewell

by Angela Matthews, Director of Development

As December approached rapidly and clearly on the horizon I am fully aware of the adjustments I will have to make to a very different life. And it is a real and constant challenge of managing demanding pairs of polar emotions that always come with beginnings and endings. The experienced soul knows that it’s an internal journey not an external one. I have to remind myself of that every day as I live the joys and sadness of the leaving — of ending.

I feel my own place as a link in the unbroken chain of Star Stewards and I am comforted in knowing I played a small part at a critical moment in time. We each do and it is at once humbling as it is invigorating.

Star was. Star is. Star shall be. Like an eternal flame we

Strategic Planning Sustains Island’s Future

by Nick Dembsey, Board Member & Strategic Facilities Planning Committee Liaison

The Strategic Facilities Planning Committee is committed to securing the sustainability of Star Island’s infrastructure. In general SFPC provides support to Island Manager & Director of Facilities Jack Farrell and the staff on facilities projects in a few different ways ranging from acting as a sounding board to providing direct technical expertise on specific projects.

A great example of creating sustainable infrastructure is the ongoing project to upgrade the Oceanic Hotel. Under Jack’s able leadership a comprehensive multi-year plan has been developed with the SFPC’s support. This plan addresses needed upgrades to the primary structure of the hotel (beam replacements), the exterior envelope to ensure water tightness (siding and window frames), the porch so that it meets current code requirements (load capacity and railing height), and the Atlantic stair egress (new tower and stairs). The SFPC has been engaged in this project acting as a sounding board as Jack developed and then over time refined the plan as new challenges have been encountered and overcome.

The SFPC has also been involved based on our technical expertise in detailed design of aspects of this project such as the porch railing and the soon to be new Atlantic tower and stairs. As the project now moves from the North and East faces of the Oceanic hotel to the West and South faces of the hotel the SFPC will continue to collaborate closely with Jack and other staff to ensure success of this project in protecting our unique historic building.
At 47 square acres, Star Island’s relatively small size is providing ample space to create a model for sustainable communities. Our most visible endeavor in this effort—a solar array—started operating on November 19, 2014. The project is designed to deliver up to 60% of Star Island’s energy needs.

Star Island’s Island Manager and Facilities Director, Jack Farrell recently took a closer look at the solar work and came away with these sentiments: “This solar project helps us to extend our values beyond our island community. This shapes our reputation in the region. We look innovative, responsible, forward thinking, and capable. We are doing something bold and taking leadership in an area of our values.”

The beauty that is the solar project has taken time, and on occasion been a struggle after decades of only relying on diesel fuel for power. The project started with the search for a new Facilities Director and a three-year strategic plan that placed a great importance on moving towards sustainable energy and away from fossil fuels. Farrell’s hiring brought about an increased motivation to make that move, and soon ideas were underway.

The next stepping stone was a grant from the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation in 2012 for $10,000. Star Island used this money to hire the Island Institute of Rockland, ME to conduct a feasibility study of solar power on the island. After the study was completed, a Request for Qualifications and later a Request for Proposals were sent out, resulting in Revolution Energy as Star Island’s partner to design and construct a solar array to power Star Island.

Over several summers, Revolution Energy met consistently with the Solar Project Ad-Hoc Committee to review and refine plans, trouble shoot and collect data. While this work was going on, Revolution Energy also looked for project funding. The financial hurdle for this project brought everything to a near halt in early 2014. Deadline extensions did not result in a funding source, and hopes were seemingly dashed when a bank pulled out of the plan due to a conflict of taking on the debt and the equity of the solar project.

But that’s when the story turns around. Years of work, meetings, conversations, and planning—and Farrell, an Island Manager pushing for this project to succeed—finally came into funding through Ayer Electric. This local contractor, already knowledgeable about Star’s solar goals, stepped in.

But a new funding source meant the need for an entirely new funding plan. This change resulted in Star Island taking on more of an up-front cost while receiving a steady and reliable energy source.

This project is a large investment, approved by the Board of Directors and Solar Project Ad-Hoc Committee, to be paid out over 13 years. Star Island is also working to secure more grant funding beyond several gifts from last year to support the project.

Star Island entered into an agreement with Ayer Electric at the beginning of the summer in 2014, and construction started in August. The project is now online. As the project neared completion in November, Farrell looked back and thought on the process: “It was about to die. Just to see the project—see these rows and rows and rows of panels and realize, wow, this is really happening.”

The move to solar power involves much more than solar panels. Only one supplier of diesel is able to serve Star Island; the reduction in diesel usage will mean fewer trips to coordinate. Changes in equipment further reduce energy demand and byproducts like waste water. Equipment changes include higher quality and more efficient diesel generators to support the solar array.

Located in the shadow of the Tucke Monument towards the top of the rock line, the solar array consists of south facing panels mounted on concrete ballasts. No trails were changed, nor historic landmarks altered. The project is designed to withstand 130 mph winds. And the array has an expected lifespan of 25 years; the batteries about half that. The panels are very durable and can be wiped clean as needed. The Shoals Marine Lab on Appledore Island uses the same model of solar panels and reports that maintenance is not time consuming.

Our Mission
Our mission since 1915 is to hold and maintain Star Island and such other property as the Corporation may hold or acquire, as a center for religious, educational, and kindred purposes consistent with the principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ.

Our Vision
Our vision is to create on Star Island an environment that frees all who come to renew spiritually, explore matters of consequence, and gain knowledge about the world as it might ideally be.
Throughout the 2014 summer, contractors and Star Island staff worked to prepare for and install our solar array. This months long task, years in the making, was recently commissioned and is providing power to Star Island.

Notes: Rain cancelled the game against YAC in early June. The AS1 game lasted for three innings due to rain. The AS2 game finished in 8 innings.
fuel and sustain it generation after generation because we have to.

I’ve heard the stories of those who come and go and I am struck by one thing. No one has ever come to the work on Star thinking, I wonder how I can screw this up. Everyone comes with their best game – with their greatest love – with their purest dreams. Whether or not it ends well is not the point. Everyone wants to do their best. For me this is the most amazing lesson of Star. We are a very strong and vibrant family and we have great expectations. Every one of us has great expectations. And though we are not perfect, our intentions are. Adding a little forgiveness to the equation will relieve us of unnecessarily reliving times of conflict.

Last year, when I announced my plan to retire at the end of 2014 I couldn’t help but think that December was a long way off. Now, here it is. Welcome the new director of development with new traditions and freshness of spirit and love for Star and the knowing that anything is possible when we join our spirits and our energies. Star’s sustainability rests upon the enduring commitment – the stewardship – of every single shoaler. Please take a place on that team. Fare thee well in every sense of what that expression means. And great gratitude for all that you have meant to me.
In 2014, Star Island was home to 60 chickens which ate over two thousand lbs of compost or what we call “yomp” on the island. This compost came from leftover food at the end of meals, scrapings from plates, and kitchen scraps. In the end, the chickens resulted in approximately 300 pounds of meat.

Herbs 7.25 lbs
Radishes 26.5 lbs
Salad Greens 55 lbs
Beets 18 lbs
Garlic 7 lbs
Kale 63.5 lbs
Chard 168 lbs
Collard Greens 25 lbs
Zucchini & Summer Squash 221.5 lbs
Tomatoes 80.1 lbs
Green Beans 76.5 lbs
Cucumbers 90.5 lbs
Basil 14 lbs
Parsley 7.25 lbs
Potatoes 50 lbs
Carrots 10 lbs
Broccoli 5.75 lbs
Cabbage 7 lbs
Winter Squash 44.5 lbs
Corn 32 lbs

How Our Gardens Grow

With the help of interns, volunteers, and staff, Star Island’s gardens have grown into a major force of sustainability on island. By harvesting our own food, we’re purchasing fewer items from mainland providers which decreases the weight of food orders and the demand on our boats.
Preserving Summer Traditions

Polar Bear Plunges
Every morning a group of brave souls makes their way down to the dock. The sun is rising just beyond the breakwater and burning through some lingering fog as people of all ages take the early plunge into the cool New England water. Waking up for polar bearing may be hard, but once you jump in, you’re surely awake for the rest of the day.

Softball Games
In the shadow of the Oceanic Hotel, the front lawn becomes home to softball games each week. Often pitting Pelicans — our summer staff — against that week’s guests, these games bring the entire island together for an afternoon of cheering, sportsmanship, and great catches.

S’mores
A small fire crackles just above the rocky shoreline as youth and adults stand watch as their marshmallows turn golden brown over the flames. Friends wait with graham crackers and chocolate, and a feast is had. This weekly tradition is often accompanied by folks strumming guitars and singing camp songs.

Register Online for Summer 2015 @ StarIsland.org
Program Catalogs to be mailed soon