

**Star Island Corporation (SIC)
Chief Executive Officer's Report
October 1, 2024**

Our Mission: *To own 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: *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. We aspire to live this vision on and off Star Island.*

Our Strategic Plan: *Our [Strategic Plan](#) has four main goals – Community, Environment, Financial Stewardship, and Governance. This report is organized around these goals.*

COMMUNITY

- We have concluded our 2024 conference season on Star Island, and what a season it was! Building on last year, we had a successful, meaningful, and rewarding season overall. We hosted lots of new folks (everyone was once a New Shoaler!). We received high marks overall for our food service operation, building on the program we established in 2023. We had mixed success with cleaning/housekeeping/bathrooms & showers, and we have identified this as an area of continued growth for the 2025 season. Overall, it was a fantastic season, with some saying it was their best week ever on Star.
- Following up on last year's Theme of Kindness, this year's Theme of Growth provides a useful and meaningful context for our work together. We are actively considering our theme for next year...
- This year, we had several events designed to welcome new folks to Star Island, with the goal of inviting them to return again as a conferee (this season and next). In total, well over 500 new people came to Star Island this summer as part of planned events, including through the District Rotary Conference (June 29, ~160 new people), the Star Island Open House (September 15, ~150 new people), Granite State Ambassadors (July 13, ~80 new people), C-10 Research & Education Foundation (July 12, ~60 new people), as well as church groups, and tours led by two Star Island ambassadors. While we have new folks come to Star every season in a variety of ways (including attending conferences), this planned effort provided customized programming for new folks, intentionally welcoming them to Star and offering them discounts to return to conferences in the future. Some returned this season, and we anticipated many more will return next year. The Granite State Ambassadors (GSA) group will provide exponential benefits, as each ambassador who came this summer will in turn be promoting Star Island as part of their GSA work throughout the year.
- On the health & safety front, we had our first helicopter evacuation since 1991, and I would like to offer special recognition to the medical team, management, and Pelicans involved for their professional and life-saving efforts under duress. The US Coast Guard was so impressed that they requested that Star serve as a possible helicopter evac location as part of their own response plan to situations at sea. COVID-19 was still with us (as with everywhere), and we estimate we had 54 cases during the conference season (though we were able to adapt and offer continuous service throughout the season).
- On the professional development front, Laurie Contrino graduated from Leadership Seacoast – a comprehensive professional development/networking program – in June. Kate Brady will be attending the American Camp Association's Staffing Summit, a 3-day virtual conference with up to 45 staffing-related workshops (all of which are available as recordings after the conference). We are in the midst of identifying an effective online abuse prevention training program for all year-round staff (and, hopefully, a couple of board members – stay tuned for more details).

- The Unitarian Universalist Alliance of Camps and Conference Centers (UUACCC) meets on Monday to discuss various topics, debriefing our various seasons, transitions in camp leadership, and more.

ENVIRONMENT

- Close-up is well underway, and things are going well. We anticipate completing close-up by late October, when our winter caretakers are expected to arrive.
- On the capital project front, we made a lot of progress this year, including refurbishing/weatherizing the Art Barn and Cottage C, window and trim replacement at Marshman, remodeling the Newton Kitchen, rebuilding the Oceanic front porch stairway, replacing the pier crane, repairing the pier, roads, and paths damaged by the January 13 storm event, and more. We also made significant progress with our planning and design work for the Underworld project, and we are anticipating having architectural plans for a rebuild of Founders prior to the end of this year.
- Originally, we had hoped to install a new electrical panel in the Underworld this year, but the panel was on back order and will be installed in the spring. This close-up, in a methodical/planned way, we are emptying out all of OBR, Pel Hall, and the Stage Room, in anticipation of significant work we hope to accomplish (ambitiously) next spring – including installation of the new laundry facility (in OBR) and the new Pel Dining Hall (expanded to the footprint of the current Pel Hall and Stage Room).
- Not installing the new electrical panel in the Underworld will defer this expense to 2025. However, this has enabled us to get even further ahead with the Fire Alarm System Upgrades, and work will begin this week to install 125 additional addressable detectors. The result of this work is that all of the old addressable detectors on the island will be replaced by the new style – one year ahead of schedule. We will still need to replace all of the conventional detectors on the island with the new addressable detectors, and we also hope to accomplish this conversion in 2025.
- We had many inspections of Star Island this summer, including fire safety, worker’s comp, general liability, boilers, propane, food service, and more. We view inspections as an important tool to ensure we are compliant, learn where we can improve, and deepen relationships with the regulatory community, and the results of all of our 2025 inspections were favorable. During our Public Access Facility inspection (by the US Coast Guard), for example, the USCG sent out a group of ~15 personnel, including the Commanding Officer of USCG Station Portsmouth Harbor, as well as the Chief of the Rye Fire Department, for a comprehensive discussion about our emergency evacuation protocols. Another example was the excellent report (please see attached) we received from our general liability insurance inspector.
- We are in the process of reviewing our annual independent contractor agreement with Seacoast Maritime Charters (Jack Farrell), which includes M/V Shining Star charters and related services, capital project planning, facilities contractor management, long-range facilities planning, facilities regulatory compliance/oversight, and various special projects. The current agreement runs through January 31, 2025, and our intention is to enter into another annual agreement.
- We signed a Right of Entry extension with the Pease Development Authority, continuing our use of the Burge Wharf (the float dock at which the Shining Star and Almeda are berthed) through October 31, 2027.

FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

- As of yesterday, we received 3,904 registrations representing 19,002 bed nights (99% of our 2024 budgeted goal of 19,177) – please see attached September 30 bed night report for more information. Though we fell a little shy of our budgeted goal for the year, we are pleased to see enrollments continuing to increase since the pandemic led to the island closure of 2020. This year, we estimate (conservatively) a loss of ~251 bed nights due to COVID-19 (including those who tested positive prior to coming to the island and those who left early) – roughly the same bed night loss as our largest individual conference shortfall this season (278

bed nights under budget). Additionally, we lost 46 bed nights due to the weather-related cancellation of a fall birding conference. For easy reference, here are some season-end bed night totals from selected prior years: 2011: 17,801 bed nights; 2014: 19,361 bed nights; 2019: 21,268 bed nights (record); 2023: 17,938 bed nights.

- Our August Financials indicate a projected year-end Net Income of \$28,090 (vs. 2024 Budget of \$111,766). This YE projection includes an unbudgeted expense of \$68K to fund a Feasibility Study for a major fundraising campaign (see below) – this is the primary reason for our reduced projected YE income, and yet we have made the decision to proceed with this investment for a variety of forward-thinking reasons. Additionally, our Room & Board Income (net) is projected to be under budget by \$52K for the year. Please see the attached financials for more information.
- The Finance Committee meets on Thursday to discuss the YTD financials, the draft 2025 committee calendar, and 2025 Budget considerations. Speaking of which, we anticipate that the first draft of the 2025 Budget will be available in advance of the November Finance Committee and board meetings. We expect to present the final 2025 Budget recommendation to the board at its January meeting, though we hope that next year’s room and board rates can be approved prior to final budget approval.
- The Trustees of the Star Island Permanent Trust Fund next meet on November 7. The value of the Trust as of yesterday was \$6,165,084.
- For the third year in a row, we have not borrowed against our credit line with Eastern Bank (formerly Cambridge Trust). Prior to 2022, we typically needed to borrow from this cash flow device every spring.
- We issued \$90,819 in SIC financial grants this year (vs. budget of \$86,000) – please see attached Financial Grants Report from Kyle Belmont for more information.
- We issued \$72,290 in SIC discounts this year (vs. budget of \$55,000) – please see attached Discount Program Data report for more information.
- We collected \$26,505 in credit card fees this year, collected over the course of the season via an option on room & board bills.
- With SIC Board approval, earlier this month we entered into an agreement with Strong Resource Group to conduct a Feasibility Study. This work is already underway, and its results will inform our decision to launch a major fundraising campaign (and what that might look like). The SIC group working on this project currently includes me, Laurie Contrino, Liz Erickson, and Scott Anderson.
- As of September 30, we had realized \$419,181 in gifts, with a pledge balance of \$27,451, for a total of \$446,632 (60% of our 2024 goal of \$740,000), with 179 Sustaining Star (recurring) donors. Please see the attached September Annual Fund Comparison Report for more information. The following chart compares our progress this year to previous years:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Realized Gifts</i>	<i>Pledge Balance</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>% to Goal</i>	<i>Total Donors</i>
2024	\$419,181	\$27,451	\$446,632	60%	850
2023	\$423,775	\$80,975	\$504,750	71%	888
2022	\$433,683	\$39,725	\$473,408	69%	844
2021	\$475,610	\$32,309	\$507,919	86%	948
2020	\$780,444	\$21,835	\$802,279	100%	1,324
2019	\$350,550	\$45,825	\$396,375	71%	977

Six years of data are included here to demonstrate how we are faring now vs. our last pre-pandemic season (2019). Though we are behind a bit this year compared to last year, the majority of this is due to a different strategy with the LOAS conferences – last year, a concerted effort to gather pledges happened on island, but this year, we are employing a different strategy (post-season).

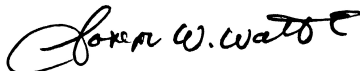
- We are gearing up for our Fall AF appeal letter, with a target of people receiving it in their mailboxes in early November. Five Maples, the “all in one” consultant we have used over the past several years, has gone out of business, so we are working on an alternate plan for distribution of this fall’s appeal. Additionally, we anticipate conducting individual conference email solicitations this fall for targeted conferences (including LOAS 1 and LOAS 2), as well as social media appeals.
- This has been a decent year for grants – we anticipate receiving a total of \$62K by the end of this fiscal year (vs. budget of \$38K).
- On September 15, we hosted over 300 people for our first annual “Star Island Open House” event. In addition to raising ~\$18K (net), this was a successful outreach event. We are grateful for our in-kind and cash sponsors, including Fink’s BBQ, the Isles of Shoals Steamship Company, our “Admiral Sponsor” Paul McKeon Charitable Giving, Seacoast Maritime Charters, Goslings, and Haley Ward. We intend to reach out to all new Shoaler attendees in the winter with an invitation to attend a 2025 conference.
- We are also gearing up for Starry Night, which is scheduled to take place at the Discover Portsmouth Center on November 16. Alex de Steiguer, our winter caretaker, will be the speaker for this in-person event. We are actively soliciting items for our Starry Night raffle (and our online holiday raffle, taking place in late November/early December) – if you have any auction items you would like to donate, or if you have friends who you are willing to invite to donate items that you think would be profitable, please let me know.

GOVERNANCE

- Now that the conference season has concluded, we are refocusing our efforts on the Governance Review.
- The Governance Task Force (GTF) met earlier this month to continue its post-2024 Annual Meeting review of Section 2 of the GTF Task Force Report of April 2 (attached, for easy reference). The Section 2 recommendations were shared with membership at the 2024 Annual Meeting and are intended to be presented formally at the 2025 Annual Meeting. Some recommendations have been reaffirmed as presented (e.g., 2.2, 2.3, and 2.5). Others may be modified (e.g., 2.11, re: adding liaisons and/or the CEO to the bylaws) or perhaps set aside to a future governance review (e.g., 2.4, re: ISAUU and SIUCC representation on the SIC Board).
- The GTF next meets on October 25, when it will continue its discussion of Section 2, begin its post-2024 Annual Meeting review of Section 3, and identify a date for a Zoom meeting with membership (likely this winter/early spring). The GTF hopes to submit its final report to the SIC Board prior to the 2025 Annual Meeting.

As we button up the island for the season, we take pause to appreciate a meaningful season and the many ways we have grown this year (and continue to grow). Our sights now shift to continuing our momentum into next year.

With Star Spirit,



Joe Watts
Chief Executive Officer