

# KEOWEE KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP (KKCP)



## Keowee Fire Department - Helps and Protects Us in Many Ways

The Keowee Fire Department was first established in 1993. This Fire District encompasses a 30 square mile area and is comprised of approximately 5,000 home sites, 26 commercial businesses, and Duke Energy. The District is organized under legislation from Oconee County as a special purpose tax district and is governed by five elected commissioners.



Most know that the Fire Department is responsible for professional and efficient fire suppression and fire prevention. It is also well-known that the department provides expertise in emergency preparedness and emergency medical services as well. But the Keowee Fire Department does so much

more.

The professional staff at the Keowee Fire Department are also well-trained in confined space rescue, trench collapse, and low-angle rescue. There is not enough room in the article to fully describe all of these special areas, but a simple google search will provide all of the details.

Since this Fire District includes over 500 waterfront homes, two commercial marinas, and much of Lake Keowee, they consider water rescue operations to be an important part of their training. Over half of the staff at the Fire Department are certified scuba divers.

Their dive team is comprised of the on-duty staff and is supplemented by the response from the off-duty staff. The department has a dive trailer and

a special dive boat and responds to about 12 calls each year. The dive team trains from May-October in both Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee. They have expertise in a variety of specialty areas including quick entry, grid and arch pattern searches, evidence recovery, and diver equipment failures at depth.

As a constantly evolving team, there are numerous items they need to continue their good work. Some of these items include scuba cylinders, Buoyancy Control Devices, regulator sets, and dry suits for cold weather diving. All of the professionals at Keowee Fire Department, under the leadership of Brandon Shirley, Chief of the Department, do so much to help us. Please give to help them as you are able.

## BabyRead.



One of the delights of being a parent or grandparent is reading to your children or grandchildren. I am sure that your children can share with you fond memories of you taking the time to read to them, and the lasting impact this had.

Now imagine a parent or caregiver, without the

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wherewithal to be able to read to their child. Either due to a lack of understanding of its importance or simply not having the reading material available. Sadly, this is an all-too-common problem in Oconee County.

Responding to this need is “BabyRead” a local charity focused on early literacy outreach in Oconee County. Its mission is to raise the literacy levels of children from low-income families by encouraging mothers and caregivers to read every day to their babies and toddlers and to raise public awareness of the importance of doing so. This is a big step towards reducing the cycle of poverty for these families.

The need for their services is immense. According to Oconee County First Steps, there are almost 4,000 children in Oconee County under the age of five, and of that, 57 percent live in poverty. Further, 70 percent of kindergarten-age children are considered “not ready” for school.

BabyRead’s all-volunteer organization began in 2014 with eight volunteers and five families. Today they have 62 volunteers and since its inception, has served over 141 families. Presently, they are supporting 27 families as well as 104 babies and toddlers that are in low-income programs through the Oconee County Early Head Start (located in Seneca) and children up to age five in Head Start.

Families meet with their readers twice a month at a town or school library. During these sessions, readers work with moms and caregivers to practice techniques for reading, singing, reciting nursery rhymes, doing “finger plays” and playing with instructional toys. At each meeting, a free book is provided to the family for their baby, as well as some age-appropriate books for their older siblings. A storage box is also provided to help families build a small library of books at home.

As an added benefit, families are introduced to their local library and its programs for children. Bi-lingual readers read with our Hispanic families using both Spanish and English books.

While the BabyRead Family Reading Program continues to offer its in-person reading program, in this time of COVID, it also offers its readers a limited contact option. With this option, every month a volunteer reader arranges to meet with their assigned family to drop off reading material. They then follow up with calls or texts with the family, providing ongoing encouragement and consistent reinforcement of the key messages of BabyRead.

BabyRead is a 501 (c) (3) and receives its funding through individual donations, grants, local community support, and proceeds from the Belk’s Charity Day event. BabyRead is also a Keowee Key Community Partnership Partner and is grateful for your support. Your generosity enables them to purchase books and instructional magazines such as *Baby Bug* and *Highlights High Five*. These provide information and games that are tools for brain development. These help not only our BabyRead families but also the 104 Seneca Early Head Start and Head Start participants.

Testimonials from BabyRead families highlight the impacts our programs are having. Moms tell us that their babies have become more expressive and attentive. Children become excited when read to, and they become especially animated when they see their favorite books. They learn to associate reading with comfort and attention from their family and caregivers. And, are beginning to understand how books “work,” that the words describe the pictures, how the pages turn, how to hold a book, and how words in English printed material are displayed from left to right. They are learning a wide array of sounds and grammatical structures, as well as words they may not encounter in daily, family conversations.

Caren von Hippel, the President and Founder of BabyRead, was recently honored with the Humanitarian of the Year award from the South Carolina Head Start Association.

BabyRead always needs more readers since more readers equals more families served. If you are interested in becoming a Reader, or just want more information, please contact Caren von Hippel, Ph.D., cell: 864-643-8083; email: [babyread@charter.net](mailto:babyread@charter.net); or website: [www.babyread.org](http://www.babyread.org).

## Meet Your Neighbors

By Bill and Ginny Howell

### Sheila Johnson and Chip Wilson

Sheila Johnson and Chip Wilson moved into their home on Bowsprit Lane in mid-March. Sheila was born in Orange County, California, and graduated from California State University - Fullerton. Chip was born in Greenville, South Carolina, and, according to Sheila, graduated from “the school of hard knocks.” While Chip and his family are indigenous to the Upstate, Sheila lived in North Carolina for 25 years, including Raleigh, Lake Toxaway, and most recently, Hendersonville. It was a coffee shop in the latter location where Sheila and Chip first met.



Sheila’s previous work experience includes computer networking for IBM and Cisco in California. She has been working remotely for the past 20 years and is currently working from home as a contractor for tech companies. Chip started his career in the building trade before becoming a general contractor. He is the owner of Premier Design in Greenville and has brought his son into the business with him.

Chip’s proximity and familiarity with the area as well as his business ties made it a natural to locate somewhere in the Upstate when the couple became serious. They were initially looking for a place to have for their retirement years before deciding they needn’t wait once they found the right community. The relaxed lifestyle at Keowee Key and amenities including golf, and clubhouse were most attractive. According to Sheila, the indoor pool was the clincher. The couple has an ambitious renovation plan for their home which will have them living on one level while the other is completely updated and then reversing the process. Chip’s expertise and building resources should make this far less painful and time-consuming than the usual renovation.

In their spare time (if there is any) Sheila and Chip look forward to using the indoor pool that attracted them to Keowee Key. The couple enjoys fishing and swimming which means their boat will get a lot of use year-round. Once the renovation is largely complete, they are looking forward to becoming active in both golf and pickleball. Meanwhile, it will be a challenge to modernize their home and service tech clients while working around three dogs and a cat. We are certain that Sheila and Chip have plans for that.

# Keowee Key partnership tops \$1M in donations to 22 local charities

BY NORM CANNADA  
THE JOURNAL

SALEM — An effort to encourage Keowee Key residents to give to and volunteer for charitable organizations in Oconee County has reached a significant milestone — a \$1 million milestone.

The Keowee Key Community Partnership (KKCP) recently topped \$1 million in donations from residents in the community to its 22 partner charities in its first three and a half years of existence.

“To have reached \$1 million of contributions in three and a half years, I think it’s amazing,” said Jon Bachman, chairman of the partnership board. “We just thought, ‘Let’s act as a conduit between our residents who we know are giving — because we knew that they were volunteering all this time — and organizations that need volunteer support as well as financial support.’ If we can link those two, we can be successful, because we have so many people coming into the community who don’t know who these (charities) are.”

## A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Unlike similar organizations, the KKCP isn’t a 501(c)(3) organization. In fact, it doesn’t even handle donations or accept money. The partnership board works to get the word out about the work of the 22 partners — all nonprofit organizations — to encourage residents to make donations.

Residents give directly to the partner or partners they want to support personally and are only asked to include a note saying they are a Keowee Key resident. Each year, each partner organization sends the KKCP a statement with the annual total donated by Keowee Key residents.

The KKCP puts together a memorandum of understanding with each partner. One requirement for all partners is they spend the money received from Keowee Key residents in Oconee County.

“We don’t ask them to tell us who’s giving money because we don’t want to know,” Bachman said. “We don’t ask them to tell us how they’re spending the money because we don’t want to know. But we do want to know that it’s been spent in Oconee County.”

“This is where we live. This is our home,” he added. “We retired to Oconee

County ... and we should be supporting the county where we live. Look at some of these charities, they’re making a tremendous impact on the less fortunate and we, as Keowee Key residents, are making, I think, a tremendous impact on them.”

The KKCP began in October 2018 with Tri-County Technical College as its first partner, working to provide scholarships to help local students attend college there. The first scholarship recipient was Derek Keels, an employee working at Keowee Key at the time.

“He was in his last year (of school) trying to become an HVAC technician, so we funded him,” KKCP volunteer Dave Eldridge said. “Then he graduated, and now he’s in the maintenance department at Clemson. So, he has a very good job. It really was fun for me and Jon to work with him through that process.”

So far, six scholarships have been provided through the partnership, and Bachman and Eldridge said they expect three more scholarships to be available next year.

Eldridge’s role on the board has been to work with corporate partners who may want to be involved in helping partner organizations.

“BASF came on board as our first major employer, and they’ve really been a tremendous partner for us in what they do out there, financially and volunteering,” he said.

“Our mission is to improve the lives of less fortunate in Oconee County, by partnering with nonprofit organizations here in Oconee County that make a difference, and then encouraging our members to donate to them either in time or in money,” Bachman said. “Then we’re going out and approaching local businesses



CALEB GILBERT | THE JOURNAL

The Keowee Key Community Partnership (KKCP) recently topped \$1 million in donations from residents in the community to its 22 partner charities in its first three and a half years of existence. Pictured, from left, are Jon Bachman and Dave Eldridge.

as well that do business in Keowee Key and say, ‘You do a fair amount of business in this community, and this community has this initiative to support local charities. Would you be interested in getting on the bandwagon?’ And last year, we had 11 that did — 11 small businesses and one major corporation, which was BASF, that donated to a charity because of what we were doing.”

While helping to raise \$1 million in such a short time for local organizations is exciting, Bachman and Eldridge are moving toward the next goal — \$2 million.

“Really, there’s no reason to put a tarp on it,” Bachman said. “As long as people are willing to donate, we can channel those donations to those charities here in Oconee County. Why do we stop?”

The KKCP will hold an appreciation forum for residents on May 18 at the Club at Keowee Key.

For more information, visit <https://kkcommunitypartnership.com/>.



SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Keowee Key Community Partnership volunteer Dave Eldridge, left, spends time with Derek Keels, the program’s first scholarship recipient.

### KEOWEE KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP PARTNERS

- Habitat for Humanity
- Keowee Fire Department
  - Fostering Faithfully
- Collins Children’s Home
  - Our Daily Rest
- Prisma Health Oconee Memorial Hospital Foundation
- Friends of Guardian Ad Litem
  - BabyRead
  - Grace’s Closet
- Oconee County Sheriff’s Foundation
  - Our Daily Bread
- Golden Corner Food Pantry
  - Safe Harbor
  - Ripple of One
- Tri-County Technical College
- Tamassee DAR School
  - Foothills YMCA
- Wild Hearts Equine Therapy Center
  - Ride to Work Ministry
  - Purple Heart Homes
  - Foothills Care Center
  - Christ Central Ministries