



community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape

Supporter Spotlight: Bill and Nina Opel Sharing a Vision of What is Possible

***“Our major concern at this point is will the people we need to help us be there when we need it...
We couldn’t survive without the young people in our community”***

William Opel

CDP Supporter and Eastham resident



For Eastham residents, Bill and Nina Opel, developing solutions to affordable housing, looking out for our children and making it possible for people to live, work and prosper, are fundamental concerns. “The CDP is an organization that embodies the same values we value in a way that is quite remarkable,” reflects Bill. “We need to take care of our young families so that they can have a future. Our future depends on theirs.”

The Opel’s lives can be characterized as ones dedicated to service and to helping others.

The daughter of a Harvard professor, Nina grew up in Cambridge and summered in Eastham where her family owned a house on a lake. Bill was born in 1926 in Kansas City, MO. His father was a WWI veteran who went to work at the Ford plant following the war. When the depression came, however, life was upended as his father lost his job and the family moved to Leavenworth where his father worked as a prison guard.

Following high school, Bill enlisted in the Navy and returned to attend Harvard through the G.I. Bill. It was while attending Harvard that he met Nina, a student at Radcliffe College. He continued his studies at the Episcopal Theological School and was ordained as a minister after graduation. In the meantime, Nina went to school for social work at Simmons College. They married in 1961.

Nina’s first jobs included working with indigent women and children in New York City, and children in the foster care system. Bill served as a chaplain for different congregations and, it was during the early 1960s, while a chaplain in Virginia, that he worked to integrate his congregation.

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In the late 1960s Bill and Nina traveled to Ghana where Bill served in the Peace Corps running an education program with 150 teachers while Nina worked for AFS preparing Ghanaian children for a year abroad. “It was the most rewarding job I’ve ever had,” reminisces Nina.

Upon their return Bill worked with a Roman Catholic dissident group in Washington D.C. where he continued his ongoing efforts of integrating church and community groups.

In 1988, they moved to the Cape and settled into Nina’s family home. Nina volunteered with the Homeless Prevention Council; the ability to serve the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in our community suited her well. When the Eastham Committee for Early Childhood threatened to close in the 90’s, Bill helped them raise money, and left them with scholarship funds and a list of supporters for future fundraising.

Bill became a Selectman in Eastham in 2001 and drafted the charge for creating an affordable housing committee. That is when Gwen Pelletier, then Executive Director at the CDP, reached out to him, beginning their ongoing support of the work of the CDP. The Opels believed that the founders of the CDP had a vision of what was possible and the best way they could share in that vision was to make contributions and support the work of the CDP.

They are both very concerned about the future of the Cape and how the lack of affordable housing is impacting job sectors that are critical to the health and well-being of the entire community. Bill notes that “in our age group we have our houses, and many of us are insulated from the concern of having a roof over our head. Our major concern at this point is will the people we need to help us be there when we need it?” He goes on to say “we couldn’t survive without the young people in our community.”

Nina and Bill are also big fans of the Community Investment Tax Credit program and were early adopters when the program was launched in 2015. “It made it possible for us to double our donation and give to a program that addresses the personal concerns that we have regarding the welfare of a lot of people,” says Bill. “The programs developed at the CDP make it possible for people who may be unable to do so themselves live with a measure of grace and certainty. The CDP makes it possible for people like us to live here.”



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