



## community development partnership

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

### Supporter Spotlight: Jill Stauffer

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Jill Stauffer  
Executive Director, Provincetown Commons



Jill Stauffer loves connecting people. After a 30-year career in management, working first for UPS then Comcast, Jill left Boston and the corporate scene in 2019 to lead the Provincetown Commons – a collaborative workspace for artists and small businesses housed in the Town’s former Community Center

A native of Syracuse, NY and graduate of Arizona State University, Jill moved to Provincetown during the summers of 1985-87. She had first visited Provincetown after high school graduation. “I always knew it would be a welcoming place for LGBTQIA,” reflects Jill, and knew she would return.

During those summers, Jill earned her living as a waitress at local favorites such as Gabriel’s, The Boat Slip, Snug Harbor, and the Lobster Pot. In the off-season, Jill returned to Tempe, AZ where she worked as a driver for UPS. Jill fondly recalls “People treated me so nicely in those summers when I first moved to Provincetown. I felt so welcome.”

Jill’s sister, with whom she is extremely close, was living in Boston at the time. Jill says with a smile “She lured me back so we could be closer.” That was in 1989 and Jill “knew then that if I could ever get back to Provincetown in a non-profit capacity I would jump on it.” In 2005, Jill and her wife bought a house in Provincetown and became second homeowners until 2019 when they moved here full time.

Beginning in 2017 a group of Provincetown residents started a movement to breathe new life into the building located at 46 Bradford Street. Formerly the old elementary school and community center, the building had always been a center of education for the community. A request for proposals for the

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renovations was issued and Jill was approached by a friend to help with the proposal. Numerous ideas were suggested, including dormitory style living for seasonal workers, but Jill and the group she was working with saw an unmet need in the community and had a more expansive vision of how that space could be utilized. It was during this time that the group reached out to the CDP for input and guidance on the project. CDP CEO Jay Coburn served on the economic development subcommittee and was invited to explore what synergies could be created.

For years local artists had been lamenting the lack of exhibition and studio space. Additionally, as more people transitioned to working remotely, they were losing their ability to network and connect face to face with other like-minded individuals. While there were several outstanding arts organizations already serving artists in the area, there was a gap that needed to be filled.

The CDP has an impressive track record helping small business owners either start or grow a business, and at one point had an office in Provincetown. When government funding dried up the CDP had to shutter the Provincetown office and provide all services out of its Eastham location. This was problematic for people needing small business support services given the challenges of public transportation coupled with the fact that many people in Provincetown don't own a vehicle. Thus, when the Commons opened in January of 2019, it was the perfect opportunity for the CDP to partner with them, offering our services and programming for small businesses in Provincetown.

Initially Jill was the project consultant, "but I fell in love with it and stayed," says Jill, becoming the organization's first Executive Director. The Commons strikes a 50/50 balance between artists and other professionals and has become the new communal space and patron of community development. On a recent tour of the Commons there was a visual artist, filmmaker, editor of a literary magazine, and a choreographer all working in the space.

The Commons was open for a year, with the CDP holding monthly office hours, until March 15, 2020 when the Coronavirus pandemic shut everything down. "We held regular zoom calls to keep people connected," says Jill, and in June the Commons was able to open its doors to 50% capacity. "The artists were the first to come back," says Jill. "So many just needed to get back to creating art in their shared studio space."

One of the ways the CDP has worked with the Commons is to focus on helping artists improve their business and marketing skills. Ann Robinson, the CDP's Chief Program Officer "has been very helpful in sharing what the CDP is doing and helping us to better understand the economic opportunities of the Lower Cape," says Jill.

Building on this relationship, Jill has recently joined the CDP's Advisory Council, and in that role hopes that she can help connect people in Provincetown with others in the broader community in order to overcome the challenges facing entrepreneurs. "I see myself as a connector, and I enjoy that role the most...the ability to connect, for example, one business with the tech support needed and offered by another small business is really satisfying."

If you would like to learn more about Provincetown Commons, you can watch the CDP's interview with Jill Stauffer & Peter Hocking on our episode of This Place Matters:

<https://vimeo.com/314250974>.