

UP front

Years ago – I can't remember where it appeared – I read a "statistic" that stuck with me. The author purported that 31411 residents provide close to 80 percent of charitable funding for local not-for-profit organizations. That's a big number, given that the same group (you and your neighbors) comprises less than 10 percent of Savannah's population.

My suspicion is that 80 is high; though I've seen financial statements for various public-benefit entities that suggest the relative contribution is north of 50 percent. Whatever, it's certain that the Skidaway Island community contributes much to the region's wellbeing; not only in the form of funds, but through a collective commitment to volunteerism that is equally impactful, if not more so.

I currently have the privilege of leading two local not-for-profits – Horizons Savannah and the Savannah Philharmonic. The former is smack in the middle of its core program – seven weeks of daily academic, recreational and social activities for students from kindergarten age through 12th grade. The latter just completed its fiscal year (June 30), and held elections to fill board seats and choose corporate officers. With each election cycle, boards grudgingly bid farewell to members who have served with passion and aplomb.

During the most recent fiscal year, the Savannah Philharmonic has articulated a clear mission: To entertain, inspire, and build community. The organization has solidified its financial position and operated profitably while many peers have returned less-promising results. The Phil has innovated to deliver programming that has solidified its position as a cultural beacon locally, while compelling orchestras across the country to take notice of our leadership team's work. These achievements are by-products of the generosity and hard work of key volunteers – chief among them, the board of directors.

Concurrent with the beginning of the Phil's new fiscal year, the board honors its "retirees." Consistent with the thesis proffered above – that Skidaway is a formidable engine for civic good – half (four of eight) of these retirees are 31411 residents. First, it's important to remember the four who aren't Skidaway Islanders – Nina Eidell, Carol Bell, Rachel Fields and Michael Thames. Each one of these four is special and appreciated in many ways. But this column shines a special light on its Skidaway friends, so indulge me as I salute them, one by one (in surname alphabetical order):

Phyllis Albertson. Long-time board secretary, Phyllis fulfills her duties with a level of diligence I haven't previ-

ously witnessed in a volunteer. She is sharp, witty, tough and kind. Her work on the Phil's behalf has too many layers to detail in print. She is, simply, one of a kind.

Carolyn Brown. This is suspicion rather than verified fact: Carolyn is likely the longest-tenured member of the board. She is graceful and well-respected, and always happy to connect people to solve challenges and fortify core strengths. She is as thoughtful as she is steadfast, a calming influence in both good and troubled times.

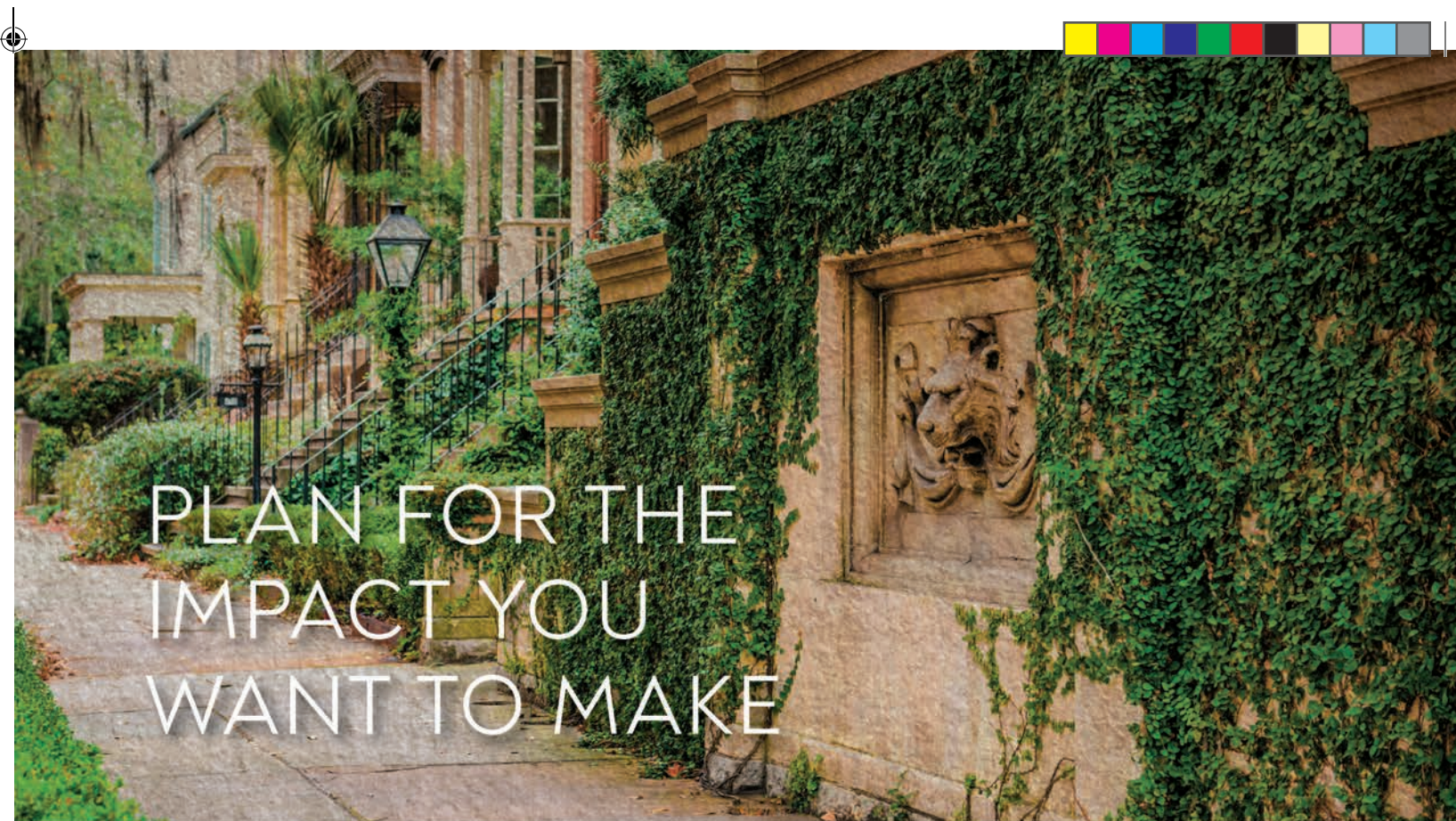
Susan Whitaker. Susan's love for music and the arts is contagious. She is as much an advocate for as she is a servant to the cause. With her husband, Ron, Susan's tangible support for the Phil and other organizations is exceptional, and the ideas she contributes are as bountiful as the economic support. She is an optimist, even in cynical times.

Rhegan White-Clemm. Rhegan has enthusiastically served the Phil for most of its life. She is an ardent fundraiser, event planner, patron and ambassador. She stepped forward to steward the Phil through a difficult transition period, and she positioned the current generation of leaders for success. Rhegan's legacy is an organization that is poised to do great things.

This is a single snapshot that captures a sliver of the outsized positive influence you and your neighbors have on the community that stretches well beyond the bridge connecting you to the rest of the world. Some of you were born in this town; many of you came later in life, some to work, others to focus on the incredible quality of life here. Whatever your individual circumstances, together with your neighbors, you have altered the trajectory of the region in significant ways. This truth warrants thanks.



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