



Lisa Bryan, KP News

## RoxAnne Simon is Paying it Forward on the KP

People experiencing domestic violence, hunger and homelessness on the KP have grown in numbers in the last year and she's doing something about it.

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

RoxAnne Simon might be a relative newcomer to the Key Peninsula by the standards of some old timers, but that hasn't stopped her from having a big impact on the community.

She and her husband of 17 years, Gerry, were living in Tacoma in 2005 when she informed him that they were moving to the KP.

"I ride motorcycles. I have an '05 Yamaha Silverado Midnight Road Star and I have a '99 Honda Shadow Ace Tour. I knew this place from a motorcycle group we were riding with, visiting Joemma and Penrose," she said. "We happened to find property (near) Joemma Beach. We don't have neighbors; we have trees. It's quiet and when it's dark it's dark, you can see the sky, you can see everything and nothing."

Since then, RoxAnne and her family have become the definition of community.

She volunteers for the Peninsula Violence Prevention Coalition, the Washington State

Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the KP Community Council, the Tacoma-Pierce County Coalition to End Homelessness, the Gig Harbor-Key Peninsula Homeless Coalition, and the KP satellite Rotary, including its diversity, equity and inclusion arm, and she's also placing free food pantries on the KP to feed anyone who is hungry.

And then there's her day job: working for Safe Streets out of Key Center.

"It's a small nonprofit, 15 or 16 employees, doing community mobilization," she said.

"Usually we get a call when a community is having issues with crime, or sometimes they want to know what they can do to prevent it. We cover all of unincorporated Pierce County."

Safe Streets facilitates the work of the Pierce County Sheriff's deputy community liaisons on the KP, but also runs a youth leadership program, local road cleanups, and even assists people growing food gardens.

"We're not the experts, but we can help find the experts. I just like working with

people on the Key Peninsula, helping where I can. Because I live here," she said.

RoxAnne grew up in the military. "I was born at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, but when I turned 8, that's when we started traveling." The family moved every 18 months for years: Spokane, Okinawa, Chicago, San Antonio, back to Okinawa — "I graduated high school there" — Colorado, North Carolina, Ohio, back to Colorado, South Carolina, Germany.

"That was with my stepdad, who was Army," she said; her father was Air Force.

"It was great. We got to see so much. All six of us siblings, all biracial, all growing up together," she said.

"Biracial marriages were illegal in the Sixties, so when my dad got orders back to the South my mom didn't go. They ended up divorcing. It wasn't until 1967 until the Loving case — that's when interracial marriages became legal. When we came back to the States it was '68, and their marriage was legal, and we were in San Francisco, where it was even more legal. But we lived in Marin County, that's where people of color lived," RoxAnne said.

"Because there was this white person in

our car we got pulled over a lot and Mom was asked if she had been kidnapped by this Black man and his kids. We knew where we could and couldn't go. We knew not to travel at night. Things that other people never had to deal with," she said.

"I was in a meeting here yesterday and someone commented 'Well, it's better here than in the South,' and I said 'No, it's better hidden here than in the South. Except in some areas, where it's not hidden at all.'"

RoxAnne left the South for good when she ended a challenging marriage in South Carolina and drove cross-country with her four children to her mom's place in Spanaway in 1993.

"We stayed with my mom for a bit, my sister for a bit, and in my car for a longer bit till I found a job. We were sleeping in the car into '94. When I talk to my girls about it, they don't recall that. They blocked it out, and that's good," she said.

"I got a job working in the office at Inland Technology (where she later met her future husband, Gerry), and then we found a house in Spanaway. My son was at Spanaway Elementary. I didn't know that they knew about our circumstances, and

**"NOBODY IS BETTER THAN ANYBODY ELSE. IF YOU THINK YOU ARE, THAT'S YOUR ISSUE."**



they showed up at our house with all kinds of items that we needed. It just floored us. From then on it became 'pay it forward' whenever we could."

The pandemic has affected that work, but the problems haven't gone away, she said. The numbers of people experiencing domestic violence, hunger and homelessness on the KP have all grown in the last year.

"Out here, it's easy to hide," she said. "People that are couch surfing aren't counted,

whether it's students or adults. Some that are fleeing domestic violence are well hidden, so we don't know. Moms or dads aren't going to ask for help because they are afraid their children are going to be taken away. So they are not counted, and they don't get anything."

One way to assist people in those situations is through the Little Pantry food drops RoxAnne and her team are setting up on the KP.

"We have one so far, I got that from Building Beyond the Walls in Buckley," she said. The Little Pantry is a small, freestanding roadside cupboard to stock nonperishable food items that are free for the taking.

"The one that we placed is on Chuck West's property (at the corner of KP Highway and 64th Street NW)," she said. "A lot of people are really interested but nobody wants one in their neighborhood, and that's kind of depressing. My concern is that people eat. We're not in competition with the food banks — they're not open 24/7. That is why there are stewards for the Little Pantry to make sure it is stocked and the area around it is clean."

RoxAnne's team includes her husband Gerry, son Clathyn Williams III, granddaughter Karma Jaydin Williams, son-in-law Robert Hill, friend Angie Mattison-Lindbom and Chuck West.

The first Little Pantry has been up since

Feb. 28. "Chuck said let's bolt it to his fence, so no one can mess with it," RoxAnne said. "A ton of food has come and gone since then; I couldn't tell you how much. Stuff is gone every day."

Perhaps the best thing about the Little Pantry, according to RoxAnne, is that it provides a service when and where it's needed.

"If you're going to offer someone help, have that help available now," she said, whether it's for a person experiencing homelessness or substance abuse or something else. "Sometimes people will say, 'Well, they just don't want the help,' and that's not true. There aren't the services out here (on the KP), and they don't want to leave what they know."

"Everybody's different in some way; everybody needs something in some way. Nobody is better than anybody else. If you think you are, that's your issue."

For more information on Safe Streets or The Little Pantries, send an email to [rsimon@safest.org](mailto:rsimon@safest.org). ■

#### IT HASN'T BEEN THAT LONG

Mildred Loving and her white husband Richard Loving were sentenced to a year in prison in 1958 for the crime of marrying each other in Virginia. U.S. anti-miscegenation laws predated the American Revolution. The Supreme Court unanimously overturned the Loving conviction June 12, 1967, striking down all state laws banning interracial marriage. In 2015, the Court cited *Loving v. Virginia* as precedent for holding that states are required to allow same-sex marriages under both the Equal Protection Clause and the Due Process Clause of the Constitution. June 12, the date of the Loving decision, is known as Loving Day, an unofficial celebration of interracial marriages. In 2014, Mildred Loving was honored as one of "Virginia's Women in History."

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