When watching the Guilford Foundation’s informational video on the lack of housing diversity in Guilford viewers hear from local people who are genuinely concerned about affordable housing in town.

“These are people who have been in town forever and are talking about struggles about remaining in town,” says Foundation board member Mary Jo Kestner, about the testimonials.

The Guilford Foundation has concentrated on affordable housing in its 40th anniversary year, after volunteer researchers from the Yale School of Management identified the lack of housing diversity as a prime concern among town residents.

“We started to try and figure out what that meant,” says Kestner.

As an architect with CK Architects Kestner deals with housing on a daily basis and “it just seemed to be a good fit for me to spend some time working on this for the board,” she says.

The result of years of work on this issue is the informational video spotlighting local people affected by the local housing issue.

“When we’re talking about affordable housing in Guilford it’s almost a misnomer,” says Kestner, “but it has a huge stigma in certain places where it has been developed.

“But really those people are the people who are in town, and that kind of housing we don’t have and we really need, because if we want the people who serve our community to be able to live in town then we need to provide a variety.”

The video has started a public discussion about the housing issue and is encouraging the town as a whole to look for creative solutions.

“When we started looking at this we realized that we really needed some help developing lower cost housing and, also, different types – rentals and apartments,” explains Kestner. “We realized that most of the housing that’s built in Guilford is large, single family homes and that they’re generally unaffordable to people who are getting into the housing market or for seniors who want to downsize and that there’s no variety.”

Looking around at the groups in town that were involved in housing the Guilford Foundation found that the Town of Guilford Housing Partnership and the non-profit Guilford Interfaith Housing were both inactive, despite the fact that housing needs was a topic that many social service agencies found to be important to their clients.

The Guilford Foundation has subsequently helped to reinstate Guilford Interfaith Housing as an independent, non-profit organization with a strong board of directors leading their charge. This is important in light of the fact that housing is and will continue to be important to Guilford residents.

“What we found is that there was really a need for all types of housing,” says Kestner. “That Guilford Social Services, weekly, gets people asking about housing and that the housing that Guilford provides through the Housing Authority has a huge waitlist and that those people spend years on the waitlist before they can get into housing.”

One reason, Kestner explains, is what is referred to as the statewide “housing gap,” when from 2000 – 2009 average residence income rose 20%, while the cost of housing increased more than 80%.

“Guilford is known for old time Guilford families,” says Kestner. “If you’ve been here for more than 15 or 20 years you don’t really think about your housing, unless you have a change in situation and that happens through death or divorce or somebody losing a job and all of a sudden it’s a struggle.”

Kestner says that opening up this discussion and working on solutions is good for the town. “It’s a healthy thing to have new people move in and open businesses and start families. You’d like it to be a community that encourages that.”
Baseball was an integral part of Ralph Schipani, Jr’s life, starting as a young boy growing up in Brooklyn, N.Y. and continuing with him through his adult life as a husband and father in Guilford. “His passion was sports,” says his son, Ralph Schipani, Jr. “And just as much as his passion was sports, his passion was community, too.”

Schipani was involved with youth sports in the Town of Guilford as a leader, coach and a youth sports volunteer while he and his wife, Beatrice, raised their son and daughter, Marissa.

“He just loved the game,” says his son. “He loved being around and coaching the kids, he loved being with all the different generations and he loved being a part of a community. It really was something that meant the world to him.”

In April 2015, shortly after the passing of his dad, Ralph Schipani established the Guilford Foundation, Ralph Schipani, Jr. Memorial Fund, to provide two scholarships to graduating Guilford High School students, a male and a female, who participated in Little League and continue to play baseball/softball.

In 2015, the first scholarship awards went to Mackenzie Iasparra and John Suchy for $750 each.

“As a child, I think, he had always found solace and found his way through trouble and kept him off the streets and kept him motivated and made him successful was playing sports, and in particular baseball.”

The memorial fund also supports other projects that relate to softball or baseball, such as the recent purchase of two Automated External Defibrillators (AED) with adult and child pads, a wall cabinet, instructional DVD and AED signage and training of all officials and coaches in basic safety and use of the AED for Guilford Little League.

Schipani says this special request was as a perfect match for the memorial fund since heart issues plagued his father for many years.

With the Ralph Schipani, Jr. Memorial Fund, his son has established a lasting legacy for his father, continuing, in perpetuity, his commitment to the community that was such a significant part of his life.

“It was important for me that people remember him, or continue to remember him,” says his son, “and just as important because I know it would mean a lot to him that he can continue to give back even when he’s not here.”

In 2015, the Guilford Foundation (TGF) is pleased to announce grant awards to six organizations serving Guilford. The grants ranged from $1,000 to $5,000 and support kids, the environment, and basic needs.

Kids HUGS, an organization founded by a Guilford woman, helps families with the changes that come along with a parent facing serious illness and chronic disease. TGF provided its first-ever distribution from the Thomas Ginz Fund for Children to support Kids HUGS’s request for funds to provide a series of Process Painting Workshops to encourage self-expression and healing. TGF fully funded a $2,500 request to enable an artist and educator from Maine to lead the sessions.

TGF also supported scholarship assistance for two organizations to help Guilford kids attend summer camp: Middletown Yacht Club and Camp Hazen. TGF fully funded $1,600 to the MDA Summer Camp program, which provides a safe, week-long overnight camp experience for Guilford children with muscular dystrophy who, due to medical complications, aren’t able to attend traditional overnight summer camps. TGF also fully funded Camp Hazen’s request for $1,000 to provide financial assistance for Guilford children to attend camp. In 2015, with help from TGF, Camp Hazen was able to grant 19 Guilford children financial assistance.

Two local environmental organizations also received full funding for their requests. Menunkatuck Audubon Society works to preserve natural ecosystems, and one of their most recognizable efforts is the osprey platform. TGF used funds from Michael & Maryann Bracken Family Fund to support replacement of osprey platforms in Guilford—the total grant was $1,200. TGF also provided a $5,000 grant to A Place Called Hope, which is a raptor rehabilitation and education center in Killingworth. They specialize in the care of Connecticut’s injured, orphaned or ill birds of prey. The grant, taken from the Helen E. Downing Outdoor Education Fund, is to help complete a red-tailed hawk double aviary, which will house the organization’s most commonly seen raptor.

Finally, TGF fully funded a $5,000 request from the Community Dining Room (CDR) to purchase food products and packaging materials necessary to the preparation and distribution of meals to clients who are working yet struggling financially to feed their families and themselves. CDR provides nutritious free meals to low income individuals and families to assure all families in our community have access to food every day. TGF was pleased to support their take out dinner programs for families.

The Board was pleased to support these worthy programs that support Guilford and those who live, work and play here. The Guilford Foundation’s next application deadline for funding is on June 1st, 2016. For more information on the grant application process, go to guilfordfoundation.org or email Lisa Janssen Petra at ljpetra@gmail.com

How to Give
Contact Lisa Janssen Petra, Executive Director, at ljpetra@gmail.com for more information.

Create a personal legacy in Guilford by establishing a named fund, for yourself, your family, or a loved one. The minimum amount required to establish a fund is $10,000. To help reach your philanthropic goals, we offer an “Acorn Fund” option, which allows interested donors 5 years to reach the $10,000 minimum.

If you are not ready to create a charitable fund but want to contribute to our efforts to enrich the quality of life in Guilford, provide a direct donation of any amount at any time to one of our exciting charitable funds.

Finally, consider a gift to our operating fund, which allows us to maintain our visibility in the community, provide leadership around community issues; raise new dollars to invest back into the organizations that serve Guilford, and provide excellent stewardship for our existing funds. Gifts can be accepted from cash, check or other assets, bequests, or planning a future gift through your IRA or insurance policy.

Save the Date: Annual Dinner & Celebration, Thursday June 9th, Guilford Yacht Club

Audubon Society.