

IMPACT 100 JERSEY COAST GIVES HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS TO NONPROFITS

Making a difference, one woman at a time

BY AMY MACNEILL
THE COAST STAR

Every year, the women philanthropists of Impact 100 Jersey Coast raise and distribute hundreds of thousands of dollars to community nonprofit groups.

The Monmouth-based group was formed in 2015, when Deirdre Spiropoulos and co-founder Heather Burke gathered together 11 women with diverse skills and backgrounds and started the giving process.

One year later, Impact 100 Jersey Coast donated \$145,000 to its first grant recipient, 180 Turning Lives Around, an organization that helps victims of domestic and sexual abuse, specifically for its Family Justice Center.

The center, in Freehold, was funded with the grant received from Impact 100, said Aimee Remy, chairwoman of its communications committee. The center is inside the Monmouth County Courthouse building, with police and lawyers present. It has a living room and kitchen where clients can stay, instead of waiting in offices.

Ms. Spiropoulos said the driving theme of Impact 100 is the “power of one, multiplied by many.”

The model originated in Ohio, where Wendy Steele recognized that women wanted to contribute to their community and she came up with a way for them to make a difference together, Ms. Spiropoulos said.

Between 2001 and 2017, Impact 100 organizations globally gave \$55 million to nonprofits. In 2018 alone, the groups gave an estimated \$11 million.

Ms. Spiropoulos serves as president of Impact 100 Jersey Coast and Ms. Burke is vice president.

Ms. Spiropoulos, who lives in Fair Haven, was new to Monmouth County in 2015, when she set about organizing Impact 100 Jersey Coast.

“For me at the time, I had three little ones at home and I had paused my career, so I was somewhat new to Monmouth County and I had noticed, pleasantly, how philanthropic this area was.”

Ms. Burke, who brought a background in nonprofit fundraising to the group, also was new to the county and said her involvement, “helped me learn what the issues were and what the groups were that were serving them.”

Monmouth was the perfect starting point, Ms. Spiropoulos said.

“You need an area that has affluence, but that also has needs, and I think Monmouth County is exactly that.”

In the future, the group has its eyes on Ocean County, also, Ms. Spiropoulos said.

“We call ourselves Impact 100 Jersey Coast on purpose, knowing that in time we’d like to grow both our nonprofit reach and our membership,” she said.

Point Pleasant resident and grant writer Heather Keefe is one of the group’s initial 11 members.

“I love the fact that it’s one woman, one vote,” she said. “It’s just a very excit-



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HEATHER KEEFE, IMPACT 100 JERSEY COAST MEMBER

MARK R. SULLIVAN THE COAST STAR

Vice president and co-founder of Impact 100 Jersey Coast Heather Burke [right] speaks during a membership drive for the group that was held at the home of Holly Deitz in Belmar on Wednesday, Feb. 13.

ing group for me to be a part of.”

Her experience is unusual because she works as a grant writer and a nonprofit consultant.

“I became acquainted with Impact 100 Jersey Coast as a grant writer, because I submitted grant proposals to the organization during its first year. I was so impressed by the grant process and the members that I decided to join,” Ms. Keefe said. “I just value the process that Impact 100 takes very seriously, in terms of having a grant application that is extensive, but fair, that’s thorough, but asks important questions that I don’t see in every grant application that I write.”

From November to March, Impact 100 is focused on membership, according to Ms. Remy. The total number of members the group gathers as of March leads to the dollar amount of the grants it will award to nonprofits.

“Year one, we were able to get 145 members. Year two, we were able to get 246 members and this past year, we got 336,” Ms. Remy said.

Most recently, in 2018, Impact 100 Jersey Coast truly made a difference by donating three \$12,000 grants — to Caregiver Volunteers of Central Jersey, CFC Loud N Clear Foundation, and Family Resources Associates.

The “Impact story,” Ms. Remy said, is giving out grants that are over \$100,000, to truly make a difference.

GETTING INVOLVED

For Ms. Spiropoulos, the women of Impact are what the organization is all about.

“I just feel like it’s not about our founders. It’s really about these amazing women from the community who believed in us and are ... really putting their

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DEIRDRE SPIROPOULOS, PRESIDENT AND CO-FOUNDER OF IMPACT 100 JERSEY COAST



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Ms. Burke helped found Impact 100 Jersey Coast in 2015.

money where their mouth is,” she said.

With the fourth grant cycle coming up this spring, the group is looking forward to expanding its reach by expanding its membership.

While every woman donates the same amount of money to become a member, the level of participation in the organization is

up to the individual, Ms. Spiropoulos said.

“If you want to get involved you can, but if you don’t want to get involved, that’s perfectly fine. You get to vote and it’s one woman, one donation, and one vote.”

‘HANDS-ON APPROACH TO GIVING’

For women in Impact 100 that have the time and want to participate in the

grant review committees, Ms. Spiropoulos said it is a “hands-on approach to giving.”

“That’s a great part of this process, the women that are members are super involved in learning more,” Ms. Remy said.

Members can serve on grant review committees in the following categories: arts and culture, children and families, education, health and wellness, environment and parks and recreation.

Committee members then read through the applications, come together as a group to discuss them, and after a thorough financial review, may visit the site of the nonprofit’s project.

To get a “deeper dive” into what the nonprofit is looking to do, Ms. Spiropoulos said, members complete the site visit and evaluate — “Is this something our members, our entire membership would stand behind?”

Grants from Impact 100 are given to benefit a specific project the nonprofit is aiming to accomplish. The organization applying for funding must explain exactly what it is going to do with the money, Ms. Spiropoulos said.

“It’s really focused on something that’s going to change our community, something that Impact 100 can be a part of,” Ms. Remy said.

Each committee chooses one finalist, to narrow down to five finalists in total.

In November, the Impact 100 members hear presentations from the five groups, vote together on the most deserving nonprofit and announce the grant recipients the same night.

“A lot of women get very attached to causes that might not make it to be a finalist or they get attached to causes that are finalists ...They find almost like a

passion within Impact to do more work for these nonprofits.”

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER

“I was excited because I hadn’t been involved in the nonprofit world,” said Ms. Keefe.

Impact 100 is a way for her to network in Monmouth County and enhance her communication skills.

“It wasn’t like proven in our area, wasn’t something that all my friends were in. It was more like using my skill base; let’s see where this goes,” she said.

A goal for the group in 2019, Ms. Burke said, is to reach a point where it has given out \$1 million to nonprofits. “It’s going to be a big year for Impact, in the sense that this is the year we will cross that million dollar mark,” she said.

Impact 100 wants to spread the word for more women to join, to help fund the “high-impact projects” of nonprofits, she said.

Women who are uncertain about whether they want to join or simply want more information are encouraged to come to an information session, Ms. Keefe said.

To get involved, learn more about Impact, apply for a grant or search for event dates, visit www.impact100jerseycoast.org.

A membership-drive event for the organization will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 21, at Reef and Barrel, 153 Sea Girt Ave., in Manasquan.

“Every woman counts,” Ms. Spiropoulos said. “One woman can really make a difference, but a group of women can make an impact. If we all unite together and pool our resources, we can do something bigger and better than we ever could have as separate individuals, so every woman counts.”