ANDERSON ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

AIHS has always been built by volunteers. Every barn/coop/shed that's standing, every document that's preserved — that's someone's donated day. We're looking for the next wave of people ready to add their chapter to our story

One-half of a century ago, a handful of neighbors decided that Anderson Island's story was worth saving. They weren't professionals. They weren't funded by a foundation or backed by a university. They were people who cared — and they got to work.

That spirit built everything you see today: the farmsteads, the archives, the living memory of this place preserved for anyone who wants to find it. And that same spirit is exactly what will carry us into the next 50 years.

But here's the thing about a volunteer-powered organization: it's only ever as vital as the people who show up. Right now, we're looking for the next generation of people who care.

Whether you grew up on this island or just got here, whether you're 25 or 55, whether you have specialized skills or just enthusiasm and a few free hours a month.

This edition of the newsletter is about what it actually looks like to get involved — and what you get back when you do. Spoiler: it's more than you'd expect. There's a community here. There's a purpose. There's the particular satisfaction of doing something that genuinely matters and will outlast you.

The doors are open. We'd love to have you.

The Only Qualification That Matters: You Are Willing

It's remarkable what residents and part-timers accomplish on Anderson Island by simply giving their time. Much of that spirit is spontaneous and self-organized — but at AIHS, there are specific opportunities waiting for people who want to put their skills and energy to work. You may assume others will step up. But if not you, who?

AIHS operates entirely through volunteers. The farm grounds, building maintenance, events, gardens, orchard, archives, library, equipment, publications, and media — all of it is organized and run by people who choose to show up.

This is unusual even among small museums, most of which have at least one paid staff member. At AIHS, volunteers aren't just the core of the organization — they are its heart and mind. You matter as much as the buildings, if not more. If you already volunteer: thank you. If you haven't yet, we hope you'll keep reading.

What Makes a Good Volunteer?

No prior experience required. What we're looking for is simpler than that: Enthusiasm. Reliability. Friendliness. A willingness to pitch in and do what needs doing. The ability to take direction and work alongside others. Flexibility when things don't go exactly to plan. And perhaps most importantly — showing up. (A few minutes early never hurts)

If that sounds like you, you're already qualified.

Where you'll fit in

The Greenhouse, Garden, and Saturday Market

From early spring through summer, volunteers grow seedlings, propagate plant cuttings, and tend fresh flowers and vegetable gardens for the Saturday market. Market volunteers get to meet visitors and neighbors, sell produce and blooms, and — for those with an eye for color — arrange bouquets. Community gardeners from several plots donate flowers and produce to the market as well.

The Docents

Docents are the human face of the Johnson Farm — guides, storytellers, and greeters who bring the history to life for visitors of all ages and backgrounds.

On your volunteer days, docents open either the Farmhouse or the Archival Building, welcome visitors, and create an environment where people feel genuinely at home. We ask for one four-hour shift per month, with the option to do more if you'd like.

The Event Team

Events don't happen by magic — they happen because a team of volunteers plans, coordinates, and executes together. Event volunteers set up the grounds, handle food and supplies, staff the kitchen in Coop 2, coordinate parking, support children's activities, and clean up afterward. Small parts that result in fun for all!

You serve as ambassadors for the many local organizations that partner with AIHS, helping to strengthen the broader island community.

What You'll Gain

Volunteering at AIHS is genuinely rewarding — and not just in the abstract.

You become part of a team of dedicated, like-minded people who appreciate what they bring. You earn the lasting gratitude of the AIHS community and the visitors who leave knowing more about this island than when they arrived. You develop real, transferable skills — in horticulture, archival work, event planning, public engagement — that open doors to other opportunities, including board service. And more often than not, you will make new friends - all of the time.

What Would We Do Without You?

Honestly? We would have to close.

Without docents, visitors would wander without context, and the artifacts would do little more than sit in silence. Without the garden volunteers, AIHS would lose the roughly $5,000 a year in plant sales and market proceeds of about $7,000 this year.

Without event volunteers, the farm's role as a community gathering place — for island organizations, families, and visitors - would no longer function.

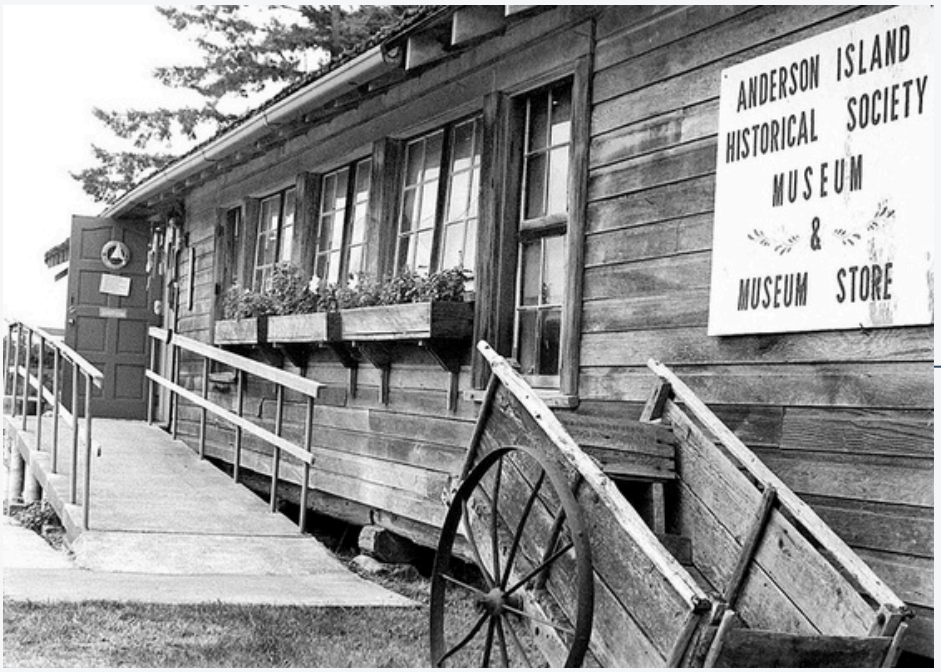
A recent study of volunteer-run small museums found that the key to change isn't how to innovate, but how to deepen the ties between a museum and the community it serves. That connection — genuine, local, human — is what lowers the threshold for new and younger visitors and makes a place feel truly alive.The next chapter of AIHS will be built by people who care about its future. We need you to help us become what you want us to be.

To get involved, stop by the Johnson Farm during open hours or contact the following:

- Event Team: Farm Day, Salmon Bake, and Apple Squeeze and more. Contact a Board Member or email AIHSFarm@gmail.com
- Weekly farm work parties. Show up on Wednesday morning at 9 am or call Bob Bedoll (253) 267-4936.
- Docents: In the Farm House or Archival Building. Contact Lee Ann Whitaker, (253) 858-5678.
- Gift Shop: Weekend only. Contact Virginia Cummings, (714) 318-6027.

The Museum Gift Shop: A Volunteer Success Story

It has gone by several names over the years — the Anderson Island Historical Society Museum & Gift Store (the official name, though quite a mouthful), the Anderson Island Gift Shop, the AIHS Gift Shop — but its mission has never wavered.



The shop is housed in Coop 1, a structure that originally sheltered around 2,000 chickens. The building itself is a piece of history: a Sears & Roebuck catalog kit, shipped to the island in sections and assembled on-site. Adjoining the shop is a small museum featuring island memorabilia, vintage curiosities, and a modest but meaningful exhibit of artifacts from the island's original schoolhouse. It's the kind of place where visitors come in for a souvenir and leave knowing a little more about where they are.

Built by Volunteers, Sustained by Community

The shop has been volunteer-run for more than 35 years. In its early days, a committee of women managed everything. Later, Kathy Bailey and Jeannie Ditmore took the lead, with Kathy eventually taking the helm. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a temporary closure, but turned out to be an be an opportunity. In 2020, Leslie Lamb and Virginia Cummings stepped up to reimagine how the store operated. They installed a modern point-of-sale system, completed a full inventory, and cleared out outdated stock to make the offerings fresher and more appealing. Eventually, the doors reopened to enthusiastic volunteers and even more enthusiastic customers.

How It Works

The shop manages its own day-to-day finances and operates independently, contributing any year-end profits to AIHS to support maintenance. It's a model that has worked well for both the store and the Society.

Keeping shelves stocked as sales have grown is an ongoing challenge. Many vendors require minimum purchase quantities that can strain a small operation, so the team negotiates lower minimums and takes advantage of vendor sample sales to buy strategically. The inventory balances reliable staple items with a significant consignment component — roughly a quarter of what's on the shelves comes from island artists.

That consignment relationship is part of what makes the shop special. Most volunteers are also consignors, and the incentive structure rewards involvement: consignors earn a higher percentage when they volunteer once a quarter, and a better rate still for volunteering once a month.

Having the makers present in the store genuinely boosts sales — customers love knowing the story behind what they're buying.

More Than a Gift Shop

Ask the volunteers what they actually do, and they'll tell you: they're the welcome people. The shop functions as an informal visitor center for the island, fielding questions about hiking trails, children's play areas, real estate, ferry schedules, and directions. The conversations are as much a part of the experience as anything on the shelves, and the volunteers wouldn't have it any other way.

If you enjoy welcoming visitors, supporting local artists, sharing what you love about this island — there's a spot for you. New volunteers are always needed, and the learning curve is gentle. You'll gain a front-row seat to island life, a community of like-minded people, and, if you're a maker yourself, a ready-made venue for your work.

You Don't Have to Live Here Full-Time to Belong Here Fully

Estimates of how many full-time residents live on Anderson Island vary, but one thing is clear: those who return season after season — whether for summers, weekends, or stretches in between — carry deep ties to this place and see themselves as genuinely part of it. The Pearson and Geiberger families are two such households. Their stories are different in detail but share something essential: the discovery that belonging to a community is less about how many days a year you spend here than about how you choose to show up when you do.

Don and Nancy Pearson

Much of what follows is generously captured from their personally-written memoir of decades on Anderson Island. Don and Nancy moved to Washington in 1969 (with three children and a cat) where Don established a medical practice.

Not long after, a neighbor convinced them to purchase a blackberry-tangled property at the end of Sandberg Road, on the island's westernmost point at Treble Point. The views of the Olympics to the northwest, the Nisqually Delta to the southwest sealed the deal. They later learned with some amazement that the island had only recently gotten electricity. Also, a new development, popular with Boeing employees, had just been completed over the objections of some longtime islanders.

In the early years, they built a simple 16-by-16-foot plywood platform on four-foot piers — a roof of sheet steel, waist-high walls, a fireplace, a sink, and water hauled in by carboy. A small deck cantilevered over the cliff's edge became a favorite spot to watch harbor seals and the occasional dolphin. In 1995, they finally built a proper single-bedroom house and began visiting year-round.

Ferry crossings were their own kind of adventure. The boat was small — twenty cars at most — and the Steilacoom dock was reliably slippery. The island-side dock was a length of wide, weathered planks with an angular jog in the middle, rattling underfoot before sloping down to meet the ferry. Each trip felt earned.

It was along Sandberg Road that Nancy and Don found an old, abandoned apple and pear orchard that rewarded foragers with great apples and not-so-great pears. Other areas of the island became places to collect blackberries in the fall — everyone on the island has their 'secret' places to berry-pick.

Nancy, Ken's wife Sandra, and childrenKen, Laura, Beth

Life on the island expanded beyond the property line. Nancy got involved in gardening and environmental issues and, through Carol Paschal, connected with the annual plant sale and a network of conservationists. Meeting Park District Commissioner Rick Anderson led to her joining the board of Cascade Land Conservancy — now Forterra — a relationship that, over the years, helped fund several land acquisitions, most notably the addition of Jacobs Point Park.

Ekenstam Johnson Road, Don Pearson Pastel

The Pearsons were active in the island's resistance to commercial geoduck aquaculture along its shorelines — a deeply personal fight for those at Treble Point, though the whole island rallied. One memorable meeting at the Community Center drew a local politician who received a rather spirited reception that left little doubt where the community stood. Their neighbor Bertil Johnson was particularly eloquent. The family inspired others and were themselves inspired by what collective action looks like when people truly care about a place.

In 2023, Don and Nancy sold their home at Treble Point — with great sadness and more than a few suitcases of memories. The island gave them decades of community, purpose, and belonging. The only thing they won't miss? Missing the noon ferry out of Steilacoom by two cars. Two cars !?!

Bob and Ginny Geiberger

Bob and Ginny Geiberger first came to Anderson Island in the 1980s, drawn by their daughter Lynn and son-in-law Gary Brownlee, who had fallen in love with the island through friends Joe Lasky and Sharon Turman, who livedin the Riviera.

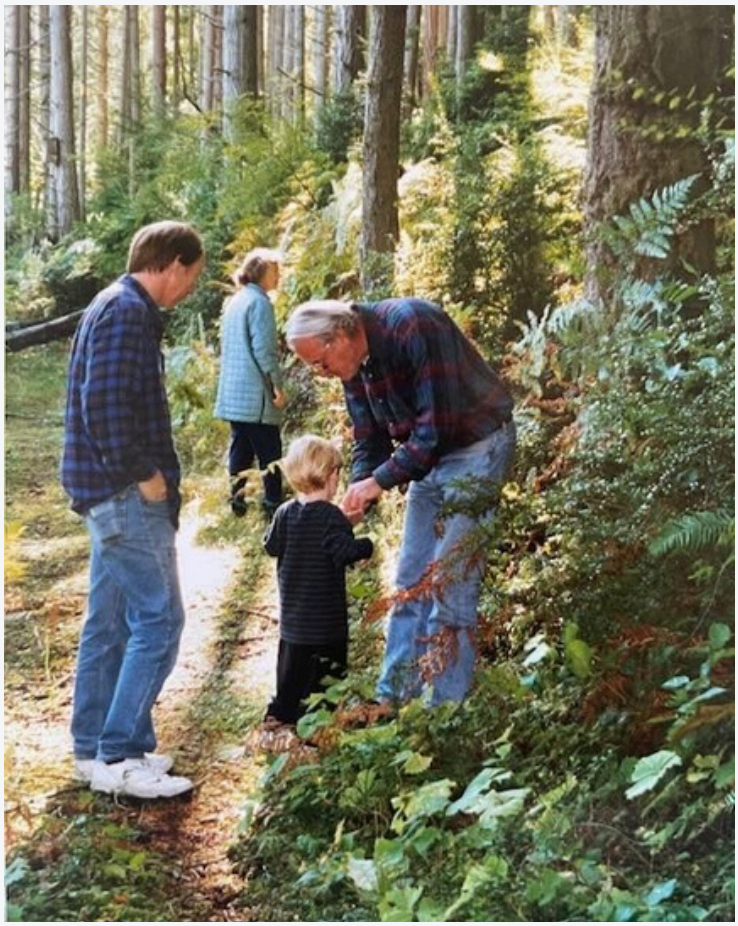
When Bob and Ginny began thinking about retirement they asked Lynn and her sister Jill to find them waterfront property without a bank: Bob had a vision of hauling logs from the water to build a home. An unlisted, undeveloped lot eventually came to their attention, and one visit was all it took. They loved the whole thing — the quiet, the land, the fact that there was just one small grocery store and no hotels or tourist development crowding the shoreline.

They built their home on Larson Road over seven years, living in a trailer on the property while construction progressed. For a couple who loved the outdoors, this was no hardship.

The finished house, completed in 1990, had an open-plan design to blur the line between inside and out — with just one guest bedroom. As Bob put it: "One daughter at a time."

Bob worked the property with a well-equipped barn and tool shed. Ginny gardened passionately, planting nativeplants alongside more exotic choices — loquats, grapes, persimmons — and baked with the same dedication she brought to everything creative. Their social life on the island was quieter than back in California, which suited them perfectly. They sailed a small motorboat, played tennis, and gathered family for celebrations,

Bob was an ER surgeon, and he deliberately kept that quiet. He was retired, and with no regular healthcare on the island, he knew that being known as a doctor — especially one with his emergency expertise — would mean a constant stream of calls. It was a boundary he set thoughtfully, not selflessly abandoned.



Bob died in 2017, Ginny in 2018. The property now belongs to Lynn and Gary Brownlee, who, though not full-time residents, remain woven into the island's fabric. When asked what keeps drawing her back after fifty years, Lynn doesn't hesitate: "It's so beautiful." She has watched the island grow and change yet still finds in it a seclusion that feels rare — no bars, no movie theaters, no chain stores, but somehow activities for every interest, and a community that holds together across the seasons. To her, it remains what it always was: a special, little-known treasure.

What drew the Geibergers most was simplicity. Lynn recalls that her father had always sought out the rustic and remote — a cabin in the mountains, a campfire, a fishing line in the water. The island gave him all of that and more.

He even produced a bumper sticker — "Small is Better" — born from concern about overdevelopment and a conviction that the ferry's small capacity was a feature, not a flaw. Jeff Gillette's store represented everything they valued about the place: a family-run counter where summer residents sometimes worked alongside locals, and community happened without being organized.

The Pearsons and the Geibergers arrived by different roads, stayed for different reasons, and left their marks in different ways. But both families found the same thing here: that Anderson Island rewards those who engage with it.

If their stories resonate with yours — if you find yourself thinking I know that feeling or that could be me — then you already belong here more than you may realize. The Anderson Island Historical Society is one of the many places where that belonging becomes something active.

We'd love to have you.

The Baton Is Ready to Pass — Will You Reach for It?

The Anderson Island Historical Society is seeking members ready to step into board leadership roles. If that sentence made you pause — even for a moment — keep reading.

A board of directors is the backbone of any nonprofit. It sets strategic direction, approves initiatives, and ensures the organization stays true to its mission. At AIHS, that mission is worth repeating:

> "The Anderson Island Historical Society provides a view of the lifestyle of living on an island in the southernmost part of Puget Sound by preserving local culture, thereby enabling present and future generations to learn about and maintain the heritage of this unique style of living."

To fulfill that mission, the board oversees the operation of the Johnson Farm Museum, the preservation of historical structures, the care of the archives, hosting community events, and reaching out to the public. It is meaningful, hands-on work — and right now, there are open seats at the table.

The AIHS board has 10 members: five officers (President, Immediate Past President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, who together form the Executive Committee) and five directors overseeing Archives, Education, Events, Operations and Facilities, and Public Information.

Although AIHS bylaws set board terms at two to four years, many members have served for 20 years or more! The community is deeply grateful for that dedication. But long tenure can also create the impression that the board isn't really open to new voices — and it is. If you've assumed there's no room for you, think again.

Open Positions

The following roles are currently or will be vacant by December 31, 2026. If any of these roles spark your interest, or if you'd like to nominate someone, contact President Bob Bedoll (253-267-4936). You don't need a perfect résumé — you need commitment, curiosity, and care for this community.

- President (Replacing Robert Bedoll) — Chairs monthly board meetings, signs contracts, appoints ad hoc committees, coordinates director activities, manages the administration budget, serves as a signatory to bank accounts, conducts the annual all-member meeting, ensures all activities conform to AIHS bylaws, and supports grant applications.
- Vice President (Replacing Carol Paschal) — Coordinates legal issues and insurance policies, prepares the AIHS budget and policies, serves as alternate delegate to other Anderson Island organizations, chairs board meetings in the President's absence, and supports grant applications.
- Operations & Facilities Director (Replacing Robert Bedoll) — Oversees facility maintenance, restoration, and capital construction; manages grounds and orchard maintenance; interfaces with the Community Gardens; promotes use of farm facilities; coordinates the Museum Store; supports other directors' facility needs; manages the Operations & Facilities budget; and supports grant applications
- Public Information Director (Replacing Jon Field) — Publishes the quarterly newsletter; coordinates all AIHS publicity including flyers, newspaper announcements, brochures, reader boards, the website, and social media; manages membership communications; serves as the public information point of contact; manages the PI budget; and supports grant applications.

So Who Steps Up? Meet Two New Board Members

Still on the fence? Consider Keri Ashford and Rikki McGee, who both joined the board in 2026. They are new to the island, bring very different backgrounds, and say yes for deeply personal reasons. Their stories are a reminder that what matters most isn't a list of qualifications — it's what you care about.

Keri Ashford, Treasurer

Keri was born and raised in Hillsboro, Oregon, spent eleven years in Washington, D.C., and returned to Oregon in her career journey before making Anderson Island her home in 2024.

She loves the pace of life on the Island and feels a sense of decompression after a demanding career. For Keri, its all about the nature and setting her clock by birds, bats, and roaming coyotes. As she organizes her home she is learning the 'how-things-work' on the island, and is comfortable with her new routines.

Her career was built on public service: Federal roles with the Department of Defense and the National Guard Bureau, communications support for the Chief of Staff of the Army, and twelve years in Oregon's State Procurement Office managing complex contracts end-to-end. She retired after decades of navigating large institutions and high-stakes decisions — which turns out to be excellent preparation for the focused, detail-oriented work of a small nonprofit's finances.

Keri is an avid birder and nature enthusiast who finds her footing on the island's trails and in its parks. She joined the board in 2026, encouraged by fellow members of the Anderson Island Community Fellowship, where her church became an anchor during her transition to island life. She describes herself as reserved, but she is always eager to connect with those who reach out — and her meticulous work ethic and lifelong commitment to service make her exactly the kind of steady hand the treasurer role requires.

Rikki McGee, Secretary

Rikki grew up in a military family, attending twelve schools before graduating. This upbringing prepared her well for a career spanning secondary education, museum work, art history, and eventually a Ph.D. in the instructional design of online learning. She spent years on grant projects, research, fellowships, and international consulting before returning to Washington, the state she'd never forgotten since working at Pacific Lutheran University in the late 1990s. Then she fell in love with AI.

Five weeks here in the summer of 2024 improved her health so markedly that she moved here. When Rick Anderson mentioned he needed help, Rikki said yes. She took a course in basic archiving through the AASHL, which deepened her commitment to the Society's collections. Taking on the role of secretary has given her a front-row seat to the island's history and, most of all, its people.

Beyond the board, Rikki is a trained Master Naturalist, a certified Mountaineer Hike Leader, and a National Wildlife Association steward. She coordinates summer data collection for the Salish Sea Pigeon Guillemot Network and has served on the Chambers Creek Watershed Council and the Pierce County Conservation Futures Citizens Advisory Board. She tends to listen quietly — and think deeply — about how she can best contribute.

Your Turn

Keri and Rikki didn't wait until they felt fully ready. They saw a need, recognized something in themselves that could help, and said yes. The AIHS board is richer for it — and there is still room for more.

The baton is extended. All it takes is a reach.

What's Next For You and The Summer

As the Museum looks forward to the next 50 years, we hope to engage visitors, off-islanders, and residents – be they full-time, weekenders, or seasonal – in the many activities, events, and preservation of the AIHS legacy. Many of you reading this have already volunteered for the AIHS. Perhaps you no longer live on the Island but would like to be involved. You can still participate and contribute to the community, which is not bound by physical place. We need you!

We invite you to visit the Museum this summer during our open hours or by attending one of the marvelous events. Or volunteering for one!

Upcoming Events

- Every Wednesday AIHS WORK PARTY: 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
- Saturday, June 27, 11:00 am – 12:00 pm, Reptile Lady, Pierce County Library program
- Saturday, July 4, 12:00 – 3:00 pm 2026 Salmon Bake
- Saturday, July 11, 11:00 am – 2:00 pm Tanner Members 90th Annual Meeting
- Saturday, July 25, 5:30 – 8:30 pm Annual Blues Concert
- Saturday, August 1, 11:00 am – 12:30 pm Wire Jewelry Making, Pierce County Library program
- Saturday, August 8, 5:00 – 9:00 pm Island Bands Summer Concert
- Saturday, August 15, 5:30 – 8:30 pm Americana Show
- Saturday, September 19, 10:00 am – 1:00 pm 2026 Apple Squeeze

Rikki McGee with help from Carol, Lee Ann, Leslie, Jon, Serena, Virginia, and A. Claude.