

Introducing

# Woodstock Community Trust



Neighbors helping neighbors

By Andrew Heyward, Trustee, Woodstock Community Trust

One of the most beautiful aspects of living in and around Woodstock is something you won't find on a postcard or in a travel brochure. It's the spirit of community—neighbors helping neighbors.

Woodstock Community Trust captures that spirit and gives it practical shape and tangible impact. A nonprofit founded in 1997, Woodstock Community Trust is built on a simple but innovative idea: Create a single organization that provides administrative and financial services to multiple volunteer-driven community groups so that they can focus more efficiently on their core missions. The organization's stated mission is to "empower teams to carry out local projects to improve the quality of life in our community."

## PROMOTING A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

More than 70 volunteers now work on the eight projects under the Woodstock Community Trust's umbrella. Each project promotes a healthier and more vibrant community in its own distinctive way.

- Local Deeds helps people who work in the community buy a home.
- The HUB offers a community-funded confidential safety net to people who are struggling to make ends meet.
- Ottauquechee River Trail enhances one of the area's most accessible ways to enjoy nature.

- East End Park maintains and improves a lively community space.
- Pride of Woodstock, Vermont supports the LGBTQ+ community and promotes diversity and inclusivity.
- Woodstock Village Conservancy connects, beautifies, and maintains public spaces.
- Mountain Views Education Fund helps enrich the educational, cultural, and civic experience of students in the area school district.
- Inner Rhythms provides tools for schools to strengthen mindfulness, resilience, compassion, and self-confidence in their students.

Behind the scenes, the Trust provides its projects with 501c3 nonprofit tax status; manages their back-office operations like bookkeeping, accounting, banking, insurance, and paying invoices; and offers support with donor management, legal contracts, marketing, and communications, freeing up each project to direct its energy into making a visible difference in the community.

Woodstock Community Trust's board of trustees—all volunteers from the area—recently hired an interim executive director. Tesha Buss is an entrepreneur and former Vermont State Representative whose professional leadership will allow the Trust to expand its suite of services significantly and take on more projects.

## GET INVOLVED

Woodstock Community Trust's purpose is to drive positive change by giving area residents the power to create a more resilient, inclusive, and beautiful community. You can help make that happen. The Trust welcomes any community member in Woodstock and the surrounding towns to get involved, whether as a volunteer for one of its projects, as a leader of a new project, or as a donor. Donors can support the core operations or direct their contributions to specific projects.

We also invite you to read the article in this issue of *Woodstock Magazine* about Local Deeds, an inspiring story of how one project is changing lives by helping people who work in the area buy homes. It's the first in a series of reports about the work of Woodstock Community Trust. If you'd like to learn more, please visit [woodstockcommunitytrust.org](http://woodstockcommunitytrust.org). 🏡

MORE

## WOODSTOCK COMMUNITY TRUST

▶ [woodstockcommunitytrust.org](http://woodstockcommunitytrust.org)

Below: The Woodstock Community Trust board of trustees. Front, from left: Mariza McKee, Emily Friedman, Jill Davies, Executive Director Tesha Buss, Nancy Winter, and Wendy Spector. Back, from left: Pam Mathews, Greg Olmstead, Andrew Heyward, Caitlin McCurn, Sarah Glasser Tucker, and Todd Erceg. Photo by Donna Taylor Photography.





# Local Deeds

A project of  
the Woodstock  
Community Trust  
helps area families

By Katherine P. Cox

Photography by Donna Taylor Photography  
(unless otherwise noted)

**T**he nationwide housing crisis has placed homes out of the reach of many working families, especially those who work in high-income areas. In the Woodstock region, workers in hospitality, schools, retail, the arts, and even health care who want to live close to where they work are struggling to find homes they can afford. Local Deeds, one of eight projects under the umbrella of the Woodstock Community Trust, was launched in 2024 to address that need by providing prospective homebuyers who work in the area the funds for a down payment in exchange for placing a deed restriction on their home. The project covers homes in Barnard, Bridgewater, Hartland, Plymouth, Pomfret, Reading, and Woodstock.

Sean, Ivonne, and Emily, a Local Deeds family, at their riverside cottage in Woodstock.



## KEEPING FAMILIES IN THE COMMUNITY

Amy Spencer, a volunteer with Local Deeds, says the program has helped 20 local families buy homes, stay in the community, and keep their children in local schools. “The impact is massive,” she says. Local Deeds works with local employers to get the word out to their employees. “If the employees find a home, they work with a local bank to secure a loan and then work with us to get approval. After everything is approved, we wire the funds for the down payment to the lawyer handling the transaction, for up to 16 percent of the property’s market value.”

**“That’s the benefit of the  
(Local Deeds) program.  
We are securing that house  
for a future local worker.  
It’s a guarantee that the house  
stays in the community for  
local workers.”**

— Amy Spencer, Local Deeds volunteer

To be accepted into the program, homebuyers must abide by a deed restriction on the property that requires them to sell the house to another local worker when the time comes. “That’s the benefit of the program. We are securing that house for a future local worker. It’s a guarantee that the house stays in the community for local workers.” There are no income restrictions, but the homeowner must be employed in the area, work at least 25 hours a week, and the house must be within a radius of 16 miles from the Woodstock Town Hall. It cannot be a second home or an Airbnb.



## Alison and Steve

### LOCAL DEEDS FAMILY

**M**ore than eight years ago, Alison and Steve moved to Woodstock from Brooklyn, seeking a quieter place to raise their kids. Alison, an elementary school teacher, and Steve, a media director for a research organization, found a duplex in Woodstock to rent and settled in to live in this area. After years of renting, the landlord informed them she was planning to sell the property and suggested they contact Local Deeds for help buying the home. They jumped at the opportunity. “Then I literally filled out the application in, like, 15 minutes. It all moved very quickly,” Steve says. Closing on the property was smoother than they expected. When it came to closing on the house itself, that process also ran smoothly.

For Alison, who currently teaches fifth grade at the Prosper Valley School, living and working in the same community is essential. “It’s wonderful for teachers to get to know the community. If I didn’t live here, I would probably go teach somewhere else.” Steve and Alison love the location and raising their two children in the village. “They get to be outside all day and come in for dinner. The level of freedom for kids is special in this neighborhood,” Alison says.

### SECURE HOUSING AND SECURE EMPLOYMENT

“There is an affordable housing crisis in the Woodstock area,” Amy says of the impetus for this program. The crisis was spurred during the years of the COVID lockdowns “when people bought second homes and took housing out of the market for our local workers and raised the prices in general. We saw a lot of the people who live and work and make our community what it is being boxed out of owning a home here.”

The program is based on a similar program in Vail, Colorado. “It’s a similar community. We’re a tourist environment here and we have a lot of people who want to have second homes here. We started seeing teachers who couldn’t find housing or had to live an hour away. That’s a problem. We want our teachers to live in our community. We want people who work in restaurants to live in our community. These are people who are serving our community.” Amy says the program has helped a lot of educators, hospital workers, and workers in the service industry.

“When we tell the stories of the people we have helped, the response is overwhelmingly positive. A lot of the families we’ve helped have children and there is a sense of safety and security that comes with owning a house,” Amy says. “The rental market here is minimal, and when you live and work in a community and your kids are going to school but you don’t have housing security, your life is upended. You see the impact stable housing has on their children’s lives. A few months after one family was able to move into their own house, their daughter’s report card went through the roof.”

When teachers can acquire a home, it means the schools and the students have educators who will stay, Amy says. For the community, having stable employment means their employees build community ties and contribute to the culture. “Providing safe, secure housing gives people a sense of dignity,” Amy says, “and it’s stability for our town.”



**“(My children) get to be outside all day and come in for dinner. The level of freedom for kids is special in this neighborhood.”**

— Alison, Woodstock resident and elementary school teacher



## Nadine and Zach

### LOCAL DEEDS FAMILY

Nadine and Zach are the kind of family Local Deeds aims to help: artists, entrepreneurs, and parents deeply rooted in the community, yet nearly priced out of the possibility of making a permanent home in it. Zach, a Woodstock native, met Nadine in her home country of Haiti while he was living there and working with local musicians. Their band, Lakou Mizik, began touring the US and Canada in 2016 and currently performs locally at town halls, community events, and festivals. In 2018, the couple married and moved to Barnard, Vermont, renting the apartment above the Barnard General Store. They knew they'd quickly outgrow their apartment after they welcomed two sons to the family. Finding a home was difficult, and the pandemic housing market made things even more so. "We just felt totally priced out of everything," Zach says. A friend mentioned Local Deeds, and suddenly, staying in their community felt like a real possibility. But even then, with both Zach and Nadine self-employed, they worried they would not qualify. Working with Local Deeds, they were assured that Nadine qualified as a housekeeper and singer, and so the search for a home continued with a bit more hope. In August 2024, a friend mentioned he was thinking about selling his house just across from the Barnard General Store. Nadine and Zach contacted Local Deeds and, with the program's help, bought the home. By December, they had closed on the house and settled into their new home.

In 2024, they also launched Panou—"ours" in Haitian Creole—a spicy peanut butter business. Zach calls it "the maple syrup of Haiti." Panou ships around the Northeast to Haitian communities, and now, with the security of owning a house, they hope to scale production up to a commercial kitchen and sell in local stores as well.

"This house definitely would have been out of our reach without Local Deeds," Zach says. For Nadine, a naturalized US citizen, safety has always felt fragile. Here she feels it's safe to build a business at the kitchen table and to let two young boys grow up in a house that feels permanent.

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This house definitely would have been out of  
our reach without Local Deeds."**

— Zach, Woodstock resident, musician, and entrepreneur







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## PAYING IT FORWARD

Although some people hear about the program, which is funded by donations, through their employers, Amy says there is a lack of awareness of Local Deeds and how it works. “I want people to know the program is out there and we’re helping local workers in perpetuity by having the deed restriction on the house. This is an investment we’re making in the people that live and work in our community.”

**“This is an investment we’re making in the people that live and work in our community.”**

— Amy Spencer, Local Deeds volunteer

She continues, “The Local Deeds project is part of the Woodstock Community Trust,” and people can donate directly to it. “It’s easy to donate. Just go to the Community Trust website and click on the Local Deeds link. No donation is too small.”

Housing insecurity is a problem and Amy says Local Deeds is part of the solution that allows workers to live close to where they work. “The folks who are waiting on us in our restaurants, the folks who are teaching our kids, and the folks who are serving us in our hospitals and doctors’ offices, the people who are cutting your lawn—these are the people that provide services to us and I feel like we owe it to them to help them back. We would be nothing without these people. Our town would be nothing without these people, and we should invest in them. And with the deed restriction, recipients will be able to pay it forward to another family.” ☺



## Ivonne and Sean

### LOCAL DEEDS FAMILY

Sean, a native Vermonter with years in restaurant management and hospitality, is now a paraprofessional in special education at the local middle/high school. Ivonne, originally from Chile, has over 20 years of experience as a high-end server and bartender. They have a daughter, Emily, who is in middle school in Barnard. They moved from Florida to Vermont in 2017, but despite full-time jobs and deep ties to the area, finding stable housing proved nearly impossible. They lived with family, rented a home that was reclaimed for renovations, and faced astronomical rental prices. Finally they purchased and moved into an RV, but with few housing options, they considered moving back to Florida. But they didn’t want to uproot Emily from her school and support system.

Then Donna, a friend and Local Deeds photographer, told Ivonne about Local Deeds. Despite concerns about waitlists, Ivonne approached the application with determination. Her persistence paid off. The bright cottage along Route 106, nestled beside a river, became more than just affordable housing—it became home. Emily immediately claimed the riverbank as her favorite feature, clearing invasive plants and building stone steps to the water as part of a school ecology project. The property even included



a mobile home that could be renovated and rented to another local worker under the Local Deeds deed restriction, providing both financial stability and an opportunity to pay the support forward.

"It's just so much better," Ivonne says of living close to work, school, and community. "We're not constantly worrying about what's next." Staying in Woodstock has given Emily the stability to thrive. Now, finishing sixth grade, she recently excelled on her PSATs, scoring higher than 91 percent of Vermont grade six students in English. For Sean, "Home is peace of mind. It's knowing we work hard, we pay for it, and it's not going to be taken away."

**"Home is peace of mind. It's knowing we work hard, we pay for it, and it's not going to be taken away."**

— Sean, Woodstock resident and special education paraprofessional



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