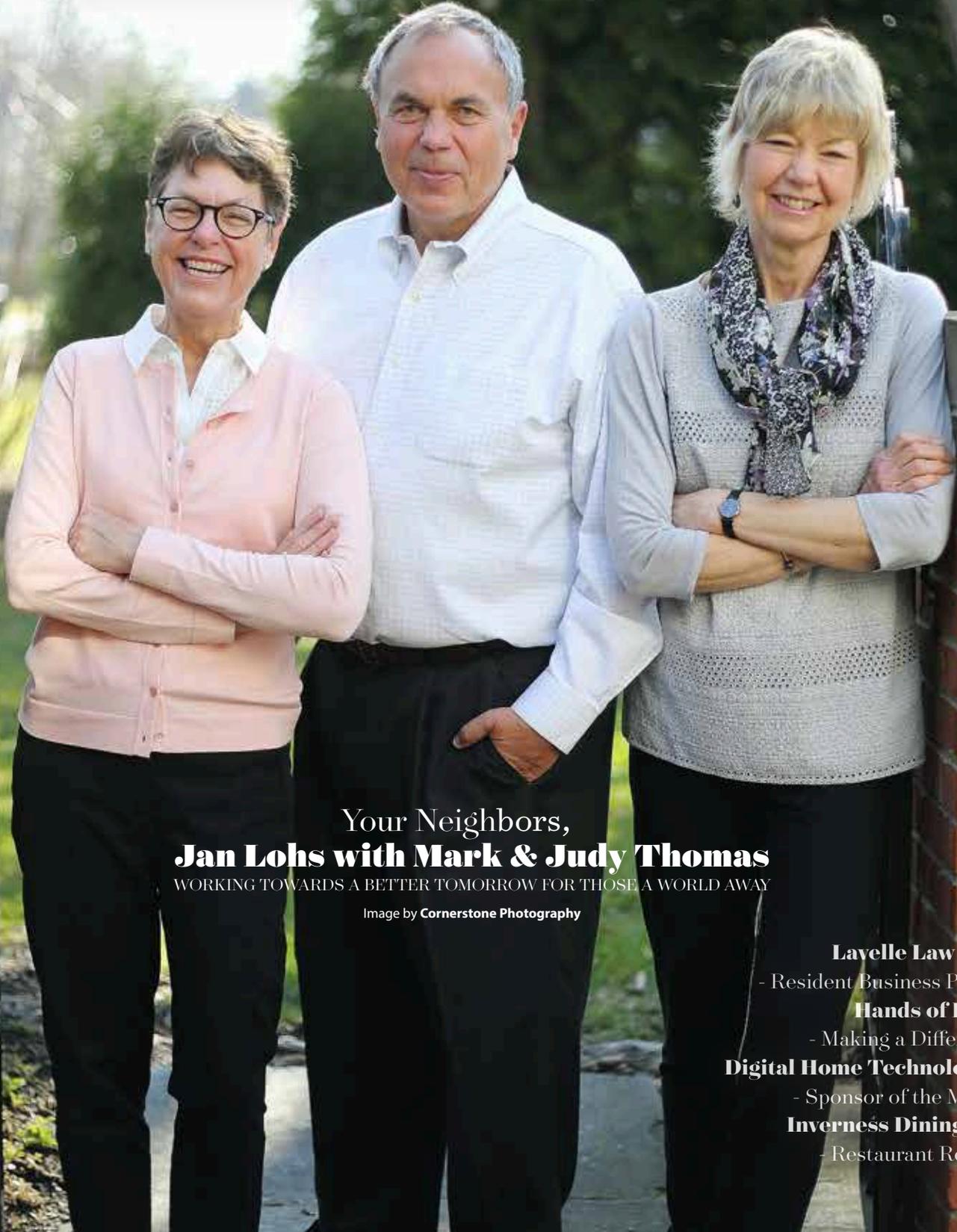


August 2018

# INVERNESS *life*

A PUBLICATION EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE RESIDENTS OF INVERNESS



Your Neighbors,  
**Jan Lohs with Mark & Judy Thomas**

WORKING TOWARDS A BETTER TOMORROW FOR THOSE A WORLD AWAY

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From Left to Right: Jan, Mark and Judy

## neighbors

# JAN, MARK & JUDY

## AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE BATTLE AGAINST HIV/AIDS IN AFRICA

By Jan Lohs & Judy and Mark Thomas - Inverness Residents  
 Images by Cornerstone Photography and resident's private photos

Jan Lohs and her husband Wayne Mroz have lived in Inverness for 22 years. Jan is the owner and director of a market research company where she conducts qualitative market research (focus groups, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic research) for a range of companies, both domestically and internationally.

Jan and Wayne moved to Inverness because of its beauty and quietness; it also happened to be a convenient location with regards to their families, the city, O'Hare International Airport, and an abundance of great shopping venues. They love the natural beauty of the area and find it wonderful to live so close to a number of forest and nature preserves, marshes, and ponds. The Fox River Trail, with miles and miles of wonderful bike trails, is also close

by. Other things they love about living in Inverness are walking the neighborhood and biking in the Paul Douglas Forest Preserve, as well as enjoying time with the great friends and neighbors they've come to know!

After many years of wanting to make a difference in the world, Jan has found an incredibly meaningful way to do so. Along with fellow Inverness residents Judy and Mark Thomas, who serve as Vice President and Treasurer, respectively, as well Dr. Francis Ntowe of Palatine, who is Founder and Executive Director, Jan is delighted to be actively involved with a small non-profit group called Prevent AIDS Africa (PAA) that is achieving success in fighting the HIV/AIDS crisis in various countries in Africa.

*PREVENT AIDS AFRICA EXISTS IN ORDER  
 "TO STEM THE SPREAD OF HIV/AIDS IN SUB-SAHARAN  
 AFRICA THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM OF  
 EDUCATION, PREVENTION AND TREATMENT IN  
 CONNECTION WITH LOCAL PARTNERS."*

Let's get to know Mark and Judy Thomas a bit more so that we can understand their background and contribution to PAA. Judy and Mark moved to Inverness in 1985 and raised two sons, both Fremd graduates, here in the community. Judy is a corporate attorney while Mark is a CPA and worked for many years at the Tribune in operations and finance. Mark also served on the Inverness Park Board for 12 years. Both were retired, but in 2014 started Garfield Produce Company, an indoor vertical hydroponic microgreen farm in East Garfield Park. Their mission is to provide job opportunities for ex-offenders in a low-income neighborhood, and the company grows delicious produce for the hospitality industry and grocery stores.

Judy's former job in the Motorola Legal Department brought them to the Inverness area where they loved the country feel to the community, the rolling hills and large lots with mature trees. It felt like New England to them, where both had attended college. Their favorite part of living in the neighborhood is that it is a great place to go for a walk as well as being surrounded by wonderful, friendly neighbors.

One interesting fact that Mark and Judy would like to mention is that their family used to live in the Inverness home featured as Tim Laurent's "bachelor pad" in the February 2018 issue! They also love traveling and going on adventures. As a family and with friends they've biked across the U.S. (from Portland, OR to Washington, D.C.) in various stages over a span of 10 years.

As has been previously mentioned, Mark and Judy are actively involved in Prevent AIDS Africa. They joined the Board in 2011 at the invitation of a friend and the former President of the organization. For such a small organization it has an outsized impact through community-networked education and promotion of the de-stigmatization of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. As a part of her involvement in PAA, Judy traveled several years ago to Cameroon to attend a PAA-sponsored HIV/AIDS educational conference for women.

Returning to Jan Lohs' story, Jan became involved with PAA because she cares deeply about people who have had (and continue to have) massive struggles through no fault of their own and who lack the resources and privileges that she enjoys. She has also become involved because PAA is able to work directly with trustworthy, compassionate, capable community leaders in Africa who are strongly committed to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Her life has been broadened and enriched enormously through the friendships she's developed with local partners and by witnessing the successes that they are attaining.

Jan would like readers to know that HIV/AIDS continues to ravage the African continent, and while the number of deaths from AIDS-related illnesses in Africa has fallen significantly since 2010 (from 760,000 to 420,000 in 2016), there still were 790,000 new HIV infections in 2016. That's 43% of the global total.\* Prevent AIDS Africa (PAA) fights the scourge of HIV/AIDS in Africa by



Judy and Jan

helping dispense essential education about how HIV is transmitted, prevented and treated. PAA also works to eradicate the debilitating stigma often felt by those who are infected. People with HIV may suffer more from the psychological devastation of being stigmatized than from the actual physical disease. In addition, fear that results from the stigma leads to secrecy and denial, both of which fuel the rapid transmission of HIV.

Jan joined PAA when it was founded in 2006 (then known as the Cameroon America AIDS Alliance), and she attended the first conference sponsored by the organization in January 2007, which was held in Kumba, Cameroon. At the conference, she met with Cameroonian HIV/AIDS experts, saw local leaders arrive eager to learn about HIV/AIDS and how it's transmitted, prevented and treated so they could help their communities (many lacked even a basic understanding), heard many personal, heart wrenching stories of how the disease had destroyed the lives of both those infected and their families, and saw the beauty, courage and commitment of the people to win this battle. That experience secured her commitment to help in whatever way she could - a commitment that continues to this day. Jan, along with other members of the



organization, is very pleased that the organization has played such an important role in decreasing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Cameroon.

In 2017, they changed their organization's name to Prevent AIDS Africa in order to reflect their commitment to helping other countries, in addition to Cameroon, that are also affected by the HIV/AIDS crisis. PAA continues to sponsor educational conferences with community leaders and influential local pastors – those on the front lines in the battle against HIV/AIDS. All of their work has been a collaboration with local partners who work in healthcare and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

Their mission statement is as follows:

Prevent AIDS Africa exists in order "To stem the spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa through a sustainable program of education, prevention and treatment in connection with local partners."

Members of PAA are now turning their attention to Lesotho, an independent country completely surrounded by its neighbor, South Africa. Lesotho has been hit extremely hard by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In fact, it has the second highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world, with one in four adults being infected. High levels of poverty, inequality and stigma toward HIV/AIDS remain major barriers to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment in Lesotho. PAA is thrilled to have an opportunity to work with their partners in Lesotho, and they look forward to seeing significant successes there, as they have in Cameroon.

We encourage our Inverness neighbors to join us in our mission and become involved with Prevent AIDS Africa by visiting our website at [www.preventaidsafrica.net](http://www.preventaidsafrica.net).



From Left to Right: Jan, Mark and Judy



Cameroonian mother and child



Cameroonian mother and child



Jan works on a task with conference delegates at an HIV/AIDS educational conference sponsored by Prevent AIDS Africa (Cameroon)

Financial contributions are always very welcomed, as is help with grant writing and social media communications.

Note: PAA is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization based in Chicago, IL. All donations are disbursed directly to PAA education and prevention programs and are not constrained by the local government.

\* figures obtained from Avert.org



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