



# Project Neighbors

Respect & Encourage Community

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Catherine Tufariello, Editor

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## New Affordable Housing in Valpo

The largest and most ambitious residential project in Project Neighbors' history—the construction of three attractive and affordable new duplexes and a triplex on S. Morgan Blvd., formerly Axe St.—is proceeding apace. Project Neighbors purchased five city lots for the four buildings in October 2008. The first of the buildings, a light gray, white-trimmed duplex completed with the hard work of a team of volunteers from Trinity Lutheran Church, stands ready for occupancy by two couples or small families. The two-bedroom units are each 1,000 square feet and feature bamboo flooring, tile kitchens and baths, high ceilings with fans, small front porches, and high-efficiency heating.



A second duplex next door to the first, constructed with volunteer labor from Habitat for Humanity, is nearing completion, and New Life Builders of Kouts has begun construction on a third. Project Neighbors will break ground on the fourth building, a triplex at the north end of the property, in 2010. Except for the Habitat duplex, which will be sold to two families, PN will retain ownership of all the units. PN has created a cooperative that “sells” each individual residence to selected families, who must meet income requirements to be eligible. The residences’ “owners” will become members of the cooperative and

accrue equity with their monthly payments. Upon leaving, residents must sell the unit back to PN at the price for which it was purchased. In this way, affordability will be maintained for future families.

The City of Valparaiso has installed an alley at the rear of the properties in order to provide access to Union St. without driveways off S. Morgan Blvd. This is both a safety measure and a means of preserving trees and other foliage in front of the properties. We are grateful to the mayor and the city’s engineering staff for this significant contribution to the project’s success.

On the completion of the first phase of this major new undertaking, Project Neighbors wishes to express its deep appreciation to the wonderful team of about 35 volunteers from Trinity Lutheran, some of whom spent every Saturday from February through October working at the construction site. Without them, these beautiful and affordable new homes would never, literally, have gotten off the ground. Our heartfelt thanks to all who helped for giving so generously of their expertise, dedication and hard work.

Looking ahead to the future of the project, PN board of directors president Paul Schreiner notes that one piece of the puzzle is missing: while PN has the

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## Valpo Honors its Rosa Parks

Close to a hundred friends, relatives, and well-wishers gathered in VU's new Harre Union on March 22, 2009, to honor Barbara Cotton Frasier and her family, Valparaiso's first African-American residents, on the 40th anniversary of their move from Chicago to then all-white Valpo. The event, organized by son Robert and his wife, Juanita, served as an opportunity to hear Barbara and others reflect on the significance of both that move and the day itself. Mayor John Costas proclaimed “Barbara Cotton Day” and declared the honoree to be Valpo's own Rosa Parks, a pioneer who broke the color barrier in search of a better life for her children.

For Robert, a V.U. graduate like his mother, the anniversary placed his family's story in a long-neglected public context, the ways in which it is “a Lutheran story.” He expressed gratitude for the support, past and present, of members of Immanuel Lutheran Church, many of whom were in attendance. Others shared warm personal memories of friendship with the Cotton children, as well as recollections of the town's initial resistance and Mrs. Cotton-Frasier's “downright heroism” in the face of it.

For Project Neighbors, the integration of Valparaiso, and the increasing diversity of our community since 1969, is one of Barbara Cotton-Frasier's most important legacies. Thanks to this remarkable pioneer and her children, we'd gotten a glimpse of The Promised Land of racial unity and reconciliation, though we've not yet entered it.

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## Multicultural Series at United Church of Christ

Since March 2009, Union Community Church, United Church of Christ has been hosting multicultural evenings on the second Wednesday of each month, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Led by Pastor Gregory Jones, the evening begins with prayer and a light communal meal, followed by a guest speaker from the community.

Among the guests so far have been members of the Cotton and Allen families—the first and second African American families to move to Valparaiso in the late 1960s—and the Albulhassan family, who shared a multicultural story of an American-Middle Eastern marriage. November's guest was V.U. political science Professor Lin Zhimin, who talked about his experiences growing up in China under Mao and contrasted that era with Chinese life and culture today. PN board members Lois Reiner, Karl Lutze, and Community Pastor Derek Perkins of First Methodist Church also have been featured speakers. The next meeting, on December 9, will feature a visit by V.U.'s Muslim Student Association.

All are welcome to attend the Multicultural Wednesdays at UCC, located at 602 Monroe St. For more information, contact Pastor Jones at 219-464-3197 or at [uccspirit@yahoo.com](mailto:uccspirit@yahoo.com).

## PN Hires New Part-Time Executive Director

Project Neighbors is pleased to announce that we have hired Tracy Traut to be our part-time Executive Director. Tracy, who prior to assuming her new position was a member of the Project Neighbors Board of Directors, is Consulting Executive Director of the Porter County Family Counseling Center, located at 554 S. Locust St. Tracy brings to Project Neighbors a great deal of enthusiasm, energy and community involvement. She has worked in the field of mental health for several years, and holds degrees in Psychology and Organizational Behavior from IUN and Northwestern. Married to Fred for 18 years, Tracy is the mother of two boys, Matthew and Noah.

## Nexus Mentoring Program, Year 1

More and more research shows how crucial the guidance and support of a mentor often is to success in any professional field. Mentors offer especially important benefits for “at risk” youth, whose academic performance may be limited by low expectations, few resources, and sometimes a lack of adult attention.

This summer, youth from the Hilltop Neighborhood in Valparaiso, where Project Neighbors has worked for many years to provide affordable housing for low-income families, were recruited to take part in an eight-week intensive mentoring program. Valparaiso's First United Methodist Church launched the inaugural Nexus Summer Leadership Program, designed to serve Valpo youth entering grades eight through twelve. Nexus (“a connection or link”) was led by First United Community Pastor Derek Perkins and

his wife Karyn Farrar-Perkins, former principal in Pasadena, CA. The couple moved to Valpo with their two children in 2008. Pastor Perkins himself was in a program like Nexus in rural Mississippi. That program encouraged youth to cultivate their talents become leaders, and it has since spread to many other communities. He explains that its purpose is to “get kids thinking about their professional lives.”

The seventeen participants spent their mornings linked to the adult world of work through internships with local business and professional organizations—among them the Greater Valpo Chamber of Commerce, Valpo Police Dept, medical and legal offices, and others. Afternoons were spent in educational activities, teaching students to prepare now for success in their future education and in the world of work.

An integral part of the program was a six-week High School Law Insti-

tute, initiated by Professor Jeremy Telman, during which V.U. law students and faculty taught students about “street law”—legal doctrine for everyday life. Students discussed such real world legal issues as free speech, landlord-tenant law, employment law, sexual harassment and search and seizure law. The Institute concluded with students preparing oral arguments and presenting them in a moot court case judged by local attorney Doug McMillan.

The Nexus program culminated with a week-long trip to the East coast, during which the students were introduced to major historic sites and American landmarks, including Ellis Island, the Statue



of Liberty, Ground Zero, the White House, Mount Vernon, and the Smithsonian Institute. At the end of the summer, each of the students made a formal commitment to earn higher

grades this year. Participants received a small stipend each week, in addition to a scholarship contribution of \$1,000 toward their post-high school education.

Many of the participants in Valpo's Nexus program were “graduates” of the before-school “Breakfast Club,” a seven-year-old program of Valpo Methodist's Hilltop Ministries designed for elementary school children in the Hilltop neighborhood. The Breakfast Club meets at the Reiner Community Center on Monday mornings. Students enjoy a good breakfast, family time, and attention from adult mentors in an informal setting. The Breakfast Club was initiated by Carol and Bob Stoner, who also did the development work for Nexus.

Planning and fundraising for Nexus 2010 is ongoing. Carol Stoner serves on the Nexus Executive and Development Board with Jill McKewan, Jack Phelps and Elizabeth Stanley. A consulting group includes John Wolf, Lois Reiner and Ed

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## Nexus Program, cont.

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Senne of Project Neighbors. The 2009 program budget of \$45,000 was raised from many individuals, nonprofits, church groups, businesses and grants. Project Neighbors made a grant in honor of Walt Reiner and his deep commitment to the underprivileged youth of Valparaiso.

Contributions for Nexus (2010) may be sent to Nexus, P.O. Box 263, Valparaiso, IN 46384.

## New Creation Men's Center

Single homeless men often fall through the safety net of social services, many of which are designed primarily to assist families with children. Homeless shelters do not always have available beds and close early in the morning, leaving men nowhere to go during the day. Late last year Tom Isakson, the former executive director of Spring Valley Shelter, took a major step toward meeting the unmet needs of homeless men in Valpo when he established New Creation Men's Center, which provides a range of employment services, social services, and practical assistance.

Since opening its doors in December 2008, New Creation Men's Center has been providing homeless men a daytime center where they can access phones, faxes, computers, showers, laundry, lockers, case management, life skills classes, counseling and spiritual assistance. Its numbers keep growing, with over 25 men per week using the Center this fall. Several men have recently "graduated" from New Creation into stable housing, including four men into Spring Valley Shelter through a collaborative effort with Christian Community Action. In June the Center opened two businesses: a resale shop for used-but-usable donated furniture, appliances, electronics, exercise equipment, etc.; and a day labor offering bonded, insured, uniformed workers for business or residential work for \$12/hour. These businesses continue to grow. A third initiative, a custom-labeled water bottling business, has received positive press and is off to a good start.

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## Hilltop Food Pantry Sees Demand Rise

The Hilltop Village Food Pantry, located in back of 604 E. Monroe St. next door to Union Community Church, is serving twice as many people this fall it did as a year ago, according to director Roseanna Gray. Many of the new clients have recently suffered the loss of a job and have not sought assistance in the past.

Gray is the volunteer coordinator at Opportunity Enterprises, and she keeps the pantry running with volunteer labor from clients at OE. Gray, now in her second year as director of the Village Food Pantry, stepped forward when it was in danger of closing after the previous director retired. Like the OE clients she supervises, Gray volunteers her time and energy to keep the pantry open.

The pantry receives canned goods and other staples from the USDA, but lately these are not enough to last through the month, says Gray. "I'm scared about this year. Everybody's hurting, and donations are down. It

breaks my heart to see people struggle to feed themselves and their families, especially during the holidays." Gray will not turn anyone away, regardless of whether they live in the area. But she mainly serves residents of the Hilltop neighborhood—families with children who struggle to pay their utility bills, especially in cold weather; single people and couples on disability; senior citizens who must choose between paying for food or medicine.

In addition to monetary donations, the pantry is in special need of the following staples: Meat, spaghetti and spaghetti sauce, milk, bread, cereal, and jelly. The pantry gratefully accepts donations of hams and turkeys or "turkey points" to provision the holiday baskets it provides to clients. Gray is also looking for volunteers who can work from 9:00 a.m. to noon on Tues., Wed. or Thurs. She can be reached at [roseannagry@yahoo.com](mailto:roseannagry@yahoo.com) or 928-6151.

### Hilltop Village Food Pantry

604 East Monroe St., in back

Open Tu, W, Th, 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

## Happenings at the Reiner Center

Seventeen kids participated in the Reiner Community Center's 8-week **Summer Program** in 2009. Three college students—with funding from AmeriCorps, Hilltop Neighborhood House and the United Way—worked with the participants. With the aid of buses donated by First Methodist Church, the Boys & Girls Club, and Gloria Dei, campers enjoyed field trips to the Michigan City Zoo, the Valpo YMCA, Horizon Gymnastics, and Taltree Arboretum.

Independence Day 2009 started out with mist and moved to a steady rain, but 200 to 300 people braved the wet weather for the second annual Hilltop **Fourth of July Parade and Picnic** to play games, enjoy music by the Planetary Blues, and see Mayor Jon Costas dedicate the Will Park shelter in memory of Mark Allen. First-time attendee Laura Smith brought her five children, whose spirits were not at all dampened by the rain. "So often parades are too long for kids and they get bored," said Smith. "This one is just right, short and sweet—literally!—and with a place for the kids to run around afterward. What could be

better?"

The RCC's partnership with the Valparaiso University chapter of **College Mentors** has really taken off, with 40 V.U. mentors and 40 students from Central Elementary School working and playing together every Wednesday during the 2009-10 academic year. The goal of College Mentors is to help kids understand the importance of staying in school and getting a good education.

Don't miss **Breakfast with Santa** at the RCC on December 5th from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. All adults must be accompanied by a child. See you there!



## Chiapas Building Project

In 2007, Neighbors Corp. extended its commitment to affordable and sustainable housing to indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico's southernmost state. Though rich in natural resources, Chiapas has the highest poverty and malnutrition rates in Mexico. Residents are greatly in need of affordable houses and other structures to serve their needs.

George Terrell, until recently the long-time chair of PN's board, has been visiting Chiapas regularly to help train indigenous workers in the use of a hand-operated earthblock press, purchased with donations from PN and other supporters of the project.



These compressed, stabilized earthblocks are used to construct beautiful, comfortable and affordable structures. Earthblocks are both less expensive and more sustainable than concrete blocks, which require 100 times the energy to produce. The energy used to produce cement contributes significantly to global warming. Energy savings with earthblocks are immediate because they keep the buildings cool in summer and warm in winter. Earthblock walls also are strong, durable, non-toxic, sound-proof, bug-proof, fire-

proof, and even bullet-proof.

Training, coordination, and construction supervision is being provided by experienced professionals at Tierra y Cal, a team of earthblock builders comprised of U.S. and Mexican citizens. All labor for the Chiapas Building Project is contributed by the indigenous communities, which are autonomous and ruled by consensus. The ultimate goal of the Chiapas Building Project is to support these communities' capacity to sustain the production of earthblock buildings independent of outside resources.

Donations for ongoing work in Chiapas are gratefully accepted. To make a tax-deductible donation to the Chiapas Building Project using PayPal, please visit [www.projectneighbors.org](http://www.projectneighbors.org). Checks or money orders made out to Neighbors Corp. may be sent to: Chiapas Building Project, Attn: George Terrell, 434 W. Oakdate #2, Chicago, IL 60657. All funds will go directly to the sustainable development projects in the Highlands and in Abosolo, in Chiapas, Mexico.

## New Housing

(Continued from page 1)

design for the final triplex, we have no existing group of volunteers to provide trade skills and labor to construct the building. PN can provide leadership, but we need a body of volunteers to make the design a reality.

Applications are now being accepted for the two-bedroom units in the Trinity duplex and the three-bedroom units in the New Life duplex. For more information and an application, contact Tracy Traut at [ttraut@projectneighbors.org](mailto:ttraut@projectneighbors.org) or at 241-0782.

## New Creation Men's Center

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The Center is gearing up for the winter season, when it will assist the Valparaiso Christian Ministerial Association in running the Valparaiso Men's Overnight Shelter, a "floating" shelter that meets from 7pm to 7am at 7 different churches. Volunteers are needed for a variety of positions. Contact Tom Isakson for more information:

**New Creation Men's Center**  
653 Axe St.  
Valparaiso, IN 46383  
(219) 548-3548  
[www.ncbai.org](http://www.ncbai.org)

## "Unity in Diversity" Vigil Draws Crowd

**H**ands Around the Square, a candlelight vigil to celebrate "unity in diversity" and peace in our community, was held at the Porter County Courthouse Square in downtown Valparaiso on November 2. Hundreds of residents of Valpo and surrounding communities gathered with candles on a cool, clear fall evening to "take a stand" for racial and cultural diversity and inclusion.

The peaceful, family-oriented vigil, sponsored by Porter Health Systems, featured music by the Planetary Blues Band and remarks by local pastors Joseph Cunningham, Lloyd Miller, Ben Lamb and Rich Schmidt, Porter County Sheriff David Lain, and V.U. Law professor Ivan Bodensteiner and Robert Cotton of the Human Relations Council, and event Founding Organizer Christine



Hisick. Each speaker then read a brief meditation and released a dove-shaped white balloon that floated slowly upward to applause and cheers—a young boy catching and re-launching a balloon that was drifting toward a tree.

The vigil's goal was to draw enough people—200 to 300, Hisick estimated in advance—to circle the courthouse square.

Accompanied by the music of the Planetary Blues, participants did just that at the culmination of the vigil, spreading out around the square, placing their lit candles on the ground in front of them, and joining hands. Hisick was elated at the turnout—"We did it! This is great!" she exclaimed as the circle closed—and said she hopes to make Hands Around the Square an annual event.

## Project Neighbors Board

Paul Schreiner (President), Ivan Bodensteiner (Vice President), Catherine Tufariello (Secretary), Rebecca Reiner (Treasurer), Keith Chitwood, Scooter Holloway, Tom Isakson, Gregory Jones, Bill Loeschke, Ted Ludwig, Gail Lutze, Carl Lutze, Sharon Mortensen, Derek Perkins, Alberta Petrone, Lois Reiner, Ed Senne, George Terrell, Jr, Pat Terrell, Al Trost, Ron West

**To contact Project Neighbors:**  
By Mail: 554 S. Locust Street  
Valparaiso, IN 46383  
Phone: 241-0782 (Tracy Traut,  
Executive Director)