



Project Neighbors

Respect & Encourage Community

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Catherine Tufariello, Editor

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Neighbors' New Vistas High School Gets Charter

Sometimes the brightest new vistas are reached by carrying on an old tradition.

Nearly fifty years ago, in 1962, the state of Indiana sent out a call for school corporations to provide educational opportunities for adults who did not have a high school diploma. Under the leadership of founder and director Ken Woodruff, the Portage Township Schools answered that call, and the Portage Adult Education Program was born. Over the next four decades, the program expanded its community outreach into six north-west Indiana counties. Thousands of adults, age 16 and



older, turned to the 24 adult learning centers each year to prepare for the GED, college or the workplace, or to learn English as a second language. The fully accredited high school program served 350-450 primarily Porter and Lake County high school students annually.

But earlier this year, the fate of the program was in jeopardy. After 49 years of sponsoring this regional resource, in January 2011 the Portage Township Schools' Board of Trustees voted to close the adult education program, citing budgetary constraints. All services provided by Portage Adult Education were slated to end on June 30, 2011.

In February 2011, with the support and backing of Project Neighbors, PN board members Rebecca Reiner, Al Trost, and Sharon Mortensen formed a plan to save the

comprehensive adult education services so many depended on. They established Neighbors' Educational Opportunities, Inc. (NEO), a non-profit dedicated to the mission of continuing these vital programs.

In the past nine months, NEO has secured the lease to the adult education building from Portage Schools, obtained 501(c)(3) status with the IRS, attained the contract to run the adult education GED and ESL classes, become a United Way Membership Organization, acquired agreements with local superintendents to issue high school credits to students in NEO's credit recovery program this year, and opened the adult education center to hundreds in the first two months.

A crucial part of the plan for sustainability was switching funding streams for the adult high school program. The funds that had traditionally come through the adult education delivery system were inadequate and unreliable. The NEO board made the decision to transition this program into a public alternative adult charter high school. Over the next few months, NEO formulated plans to replace the Portage Adult High School with Neighbors' New Vistas High School.

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Valpo's New Neighborhood on South Morgan Blvd.

by Paul Schreiner

On Monday afternoon, August 29th, 2011, PN celebrated with dozens of friends the dedication of the final unit of its Morgan Blvd. Family Housing Project. Representatives from the city administration and United Way joined members of the PN board and volunteers who had scrambled to finish the project in time for a gala Open House before for the Shannon Conley-Walker family moved in at the end of that week.

After four years of planning and work by many willing hands, the four duplexes on South Morgan are complete and occupied. What not long ago was a junk-strewn, overgrown stretch of property just south of Union Street and adjacent to the west side of the Union Street Cem-



etry is now home to eight families, including twenty one children!

There were six partners in this venture, dubbed the "Hilltop Partnership for Families": the First Methodist Church, Habitat for Humanity, Trinity Lutheran Church, the New Life Builders from Kouts, the City of Valparaiso and Project Neighbors. The property was purchased by Project Neighbors and two of the five building sites were sold, one each to the Methodists and to Habitat. The Methodists built a parsonage on the corner of Union and Morgan and Habitat built a duplex on the south end of the woods on Morgan. Then in sequence, Trinity, the New Life Builders and Project Neighbors

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New Vistas High School

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The application process culminated on November 9, with a community forum hosted by Ball State University and NEO at the adult education center in Portage. The sixty-plus parents, students, teachers, and community members who attended voiced unanimous support for this proposal. According to Robert Marra, director of BSU's Office of Charter Schools, support was unanimous from the review team as well.



At the open house preceding the forum, students offered tours of the facility. Alyssa Robinson, who is completing the final credits toward her high school diploma, spoke warmly of the individual attention given by teachers: "The staff are all good-hearted people who actually want to help you and see you succeed." She had especially high praise for her math teacher, David Shepherd, who has taught at Portage Adult Education since 1998. Shepherd, in his turn, has praised the leadership that led to the school's eleventh-hour reprieve: "Had it not been for the efforts of Rebecca Reiner, this building would be shuttered," he told a reporter for the *Post-Tribune* in October. "It was a collaborative effort, but it was led by Rebecca."

On December 5th, NEO's charter proposal was granted by BSU President Jo Ann M. Gora. NEO's was among only three applications to be granted out of fourteen submitted. Says a jubilant Rebecca Reiner, "We now can dig in and start preparing for the school's August 2012 opening!"

So the vision Ken Woodruff had nearly 50 years ago lives on. His motto, "You Can," will inspire a new generation of students, and NEO will carry on Portage Adult Education's tradition of helping students forge a more promising future.

Full Circle: 454 S. Greenwich

by Lois Reiner

Same address, same decor, same wonderful menu, new name and management. Maria Elena's is now Gabriella's. What strikes me most about the switch is the full circle involved.

Twelve years ago, when Walt asked Cruz and Araceli Ramos if they'd like to run a restaurant, they said "No—but we know someone who would." Their friend Felix Cardenas accepted the challenge and, with the help of Maria, Jazmin, Ivon, Miguel and Christian, ran a restaurant that never needed publicity to attract enthusiastic diners. But Felix's health declined, and he told the PN board he wanted to sell the business. I told Araceli, who talked it over with Cruz—and the rest is history. The entire Ramos family has taken up the challenge, and good crowds are responding.

Felix still checks in to lend advice when needed. Now he can rest; and thanks to the Ramos family, we can keep Gabriella's Restaurant at the top of our fine-dining list!

To contact Project Neighbors:

By Mail: 554 S. Locust Street
Valparaiso, IN 46383
Phone: (219) 241-0782 (Michele Nix,
Office Manager)

New Neighborhood on S. Morgan Blvd.

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each built duplexes moving from south to north. Each was occupied as soon as completed. The final and largest duplex was completed in July.

To ensure resident safety and to create a more pleasing visual appearance along South Morgan Blvd., the City of Valparaiso built a black-topped alley at the rear of the property, entering off Union Street and running south along the western edge of the cemetery. All parking is at the rear of the buildings.

One might ask, "Why are churches and not-for-profits building houses?" The answer is simple. Nonprofit organizations avoid sales tax, they

New Film Venue in Valpo

Diversity in Valparaiso is expanding in more ways than ever before. Serious film buffs no longer need to travel 45 minutes or more in search of an alternative to the mainstream offerings at area cineplexes. As of November 1, 2011, the **Valparaiso Memorial Opera House** became the home for weekly limited release, foreign, and independent films.

Says PN board member Rebecca Reiner, "When I moved back to Valpo five years ago, I was surprised that in a 30-mile radius of downtown Valpo there were 80+ screens showing the same 10-12 Hollywood films. I had to drive to Three Oaks, Hammond, or Chicago to see the kinds of films I was interested in. And so, two years ago, I approached Brian Schaffer, director of the Memorial Opera House, about having independent and foreign films there. He was very supportive of the idea and received funding from the Porter County Commissioners for updating and purchasing equipment."

Films are shown two days per week: **Tuesday at 4pm and 7pm and Sunday at 6pm.** Once a month, special cultural event screenings feature ballet or opera performances by national companies.

The Opera House is located at 104 E. Indiana Avenue in Valpo. For current show schedules, check the MOH website at www.mohlive.com or call the box office at (219) 548-9137.

take advantage of volunteer labor, AND they have no profit percentage added to the final cost. With these advantages, the final cost to the family is about 60% of the actual market value.

But there is more. The people who show up on Saturday mornings to contribute—the wanna-be carpenters, the amateur dry wall finishers, the lunch makers, the clean-up crews—these people have joined an amazing social club: one in which lawyers and laborers work side by side, self-deprecating humor is the norm, and new friends are waiting to be discovered. So don't be fooled. These givers receive as much as they give.

Students Study Cotton House Before it is Demolished

The house built by volunteers for Barbara Cotton and her six children—the first African American family to move to Valparaiso—was granted a temporary reprieve from demolition late last summer at the request of V.U. Professor Gretchen Buggeln. Students in an architecture and history course taught called The American Home, taught by Prof. Buggeln, have been documenting the architecture and history of the little house at 857 Cedar Lane. The red-shingled, white clapboard house was constructed on Walt and Lois Reiner’s property after a contract for the purchase of another home was broken the week before the Cottons were to move in.



Student research on the Cotton house is part of a larger project on the architecture and history of the Linwood neighborhood. One student was interested in studying the house, so Buggeln called the Facilities Management office to ask about access—only to learn that the house was

slated to be razed the next day. Thanks to the intervention of Provost Mark Schwehn, the demolition was postponed until after the New Year. Discussions are underway about a suitable place and form for a permanent marker.

The house has been vacant for years and is in poor condition. But it has architectural as well as historical significance: 857 Cedar Lane is a “kit house” whose plan dates back to the early 1930s. “It was interesting,” Buggeln says, “For students to learn how these kit homes were constructed.” Documentation included photographs

and floor plans.

On **January 25, 2012 at 6:30 p.m.**, the students will give a public presentation of their research at a Christ College Symposium. Students also will give a presentation on the Cotton house at the university’s MLK Day celebration. For more information, contact Prof. Buggeln at gretchen.buggeln@valpo.edu.

VDNA Sponsors Unity Day Celebration

On May 21, 2011 at the Porter County courthouse square, members of the greater Valparaiso community gathered for Valparaiso’s first Unity Day—a celebration of our region’s diverse mix of races, cultures and backgrounds. The event was sponsored by the Valparaiso Diversity Network Association, which is committed to raising awareness of issues related to diversity and racism in our community and to promoting an environment in which all people feel welcomed and engaged.

People brought picnic lunches or bought food from local vendors, admired artwork on the theme of unity, listened to local bands, and shared their stories about the importance of inclusion in the community for broadcast on WVLP.

A highlight of the afternoon was a



performance by Baile Folklórico of Gloria Dei Hispanic Mission. PN board president Paul Schreiner served as master of ceremonies, and board members Ivan Bodensteiner and Lois Reiner presented The Reiner Family Diversity Award to Mayor Jon Costas and V.U. President Mark Heckler.

Says event coordinator Zahra Nwabara: “The threat of rain kept some people away, but those who came out were not deterred by the short-lived drizzle. Diversity meant a whole lot to the people who attended, and everyone had a great time. We hope that everyone learned something new; met and made new friends; and will continue to reach out to each other. We would like this to be an annual event. Stay tuned!”

Welcoming Hilltop’s New Executive Director

by Lois Reiner

I admit to tears when Deb Lambert, her health declining, announced her retirement as head of Hilltop Neighborhood House. I’d seen the magic she’d worked during her tenure, and she’d become a hero of mine. Here’s the kick, though. When I asked her, “Deb, can you pick your own successor?” she answered, “I just did!” Through her United Way connections, Jennifer Wright had just spearheaded the improvements being done on the HNH playground by Phoenix University volunteers. Deb was impressed and made sure that Jennifer would be a candidate for the position she was leaving.



Jennifer grew up in the Hilltop Neighborhood, at 405 Union St., and retains a genuine affection for it. This new challenge—overseeing Hilltop’s growing child development program, Walt’s Place, and the pantry for HNH—seemed like the logical next step in her career. So when she was offered the job as HNH’s new executive director, she accepted and came back “home” to Hilltop.

On the Sunday before Thanksgiving, November 20, we lost our beloved Deb Lambert to her long battle with cancer. But she left us many things to be thankful for, including a successor to carry on the vision and mission of the institution she loved. Welcome (and welcome back), Jennifer!

Project Neighbors Board

Paul Schreiner (President), Ivan Bodensteiner (Vice President), Catherine Tufariello (Secretary), Rebecca Reiner (Treasurer), Lois Reiner (Corresponding Secy.), Keith Chitwood, Scooter Holloway, Gregory Jones, Jeff Lewis, Bill Loeschke, Ted Ludwig, Gail Lutze, Karl Lutze, Sharon Mortensen, Alberta Petrone, Ed Senne, George Terrell, Pat Terrell, Al Trost, Ron West, Erin Wasem.

What's New at Hilltop Too

Walt's Place – Hilltop Too re-opened for its second school year on September 19th. Located at 554 S. Locust St., Walt's Place is open 3:30-5:30, Monday through Friday. This fall Walt's Place has 27 members and average daily attendance of fourteen kids.

Children enjoy a snack and conversations about their school day, do homework or tutoring, and take part in social activities like craft projects, table games, outside play (jump rope has been popular for some time), reading/story time, Wii play, and computer time. There are two computers on the first floor for game playing and homework, and a computer lab, with 13 new computers donated by the University of Phoenix, opened upstairs in November. Rainy days they play in the games room in the basement—table games, foosball, air hockey, or basketball.



Says Youth Development Director Sue Clemens, "More staff and volunteers on any given day allow us to offer a larger variety of activities and, more importantly, more one-on-one time with our kids. From our opening through November 15th, volunteers donated 138 hours of direct service to members, and another 27 hours organizing computers. All of these caring and efficient people are a godsend for our kids and program. Community members also have been generous in their donations of time and goods. Food, school supplies, books, candy, tickets to Hilltop's Family Festi-Fall and computers have come from individuals, groups, universities, an elementary school and churches. We were able to share our old computers with members' families. We live in a sharing community!"

Stop by Walt's Place to check out the photo gallery of activities, donate supplies, or volunteer your time and skills with the children. For more information, contact Sue Clemens at 464-9997 or at sclemens@hilltophouse.org.

Chiapas Building Project Opens Training Institute

by Dylan Terrell

The Chiapas Building Project, a program of Project Neighbors that since 2009 has brought sustainable and affordable building technologies to indigenous communities in Mexico's southernmost state, has continued to evolve. Its original partnership with Mexican-based nonprofit Tierra y Cal ("Earth and Lime") has grown into membership in a large new organizational network called International Centers for Appropriate Technology and Indigenous Sustainability (iCATIS).

Most of the work in Mexico is now centered in the state of Guanajuato, where iCATIS is constructing the CATIS-Mexico Institute—a sustainable training institute located near San Miguel de Allende. Trainings at the Institute will provide the necessary skills for members of rural communities to develop their own ecosystem-based enterprises, while also providing opportunities for students worldwide to participate.

iCATIS held its first workshop series on the Institute land this past June. Seven courses, taught in English and Spanish by



experts from the U.S., Mexico and Canada, combined classroom work with hands-on field training. Topics included compressed earth block construction and natural plasters, soil microbiology, small-scale farming, water harvesting, and thin-shell concrete habitats.

Thanks to generous scholarship funds from Project Neighbors and others, 60 students came not only from the local San Miguel area and the U.S. but also from rural communities throughout Guanajuato and even a remote region in Northern Guatemala. By June of 2014, accredited courses

will be offered through partnerships with several U.S. universities. We are currently preparing for our next workshop series in the summer of 2012 and are developing the use of the MK Kiln and low-tech ceramic water filters to make a direct impact in communities in the Guanajuato region.

The Chiapas Building Project and iCATIS thank Project Neighbors for its support. To learn more about Chiapas, iCATIS or upcoming workshops, visit www.icatis.org or contact Dylan Terrell at dylan@icatis.org.

Karl Lutze Honored at V.U. MLK Day Observance

by Ed Senne

At Valparaiso University's Martin Luther King Jr. Day Convocation, held on January 17, 2011 at the Chapel of the Resurrection, President Mark Heckler presented Karl Lutze with the Andrew Schulze Award for his long-standing efforts to promote human rights and racial understanding in the University community and the City of Valparaiso. The award recognizes individuals whose contributions to racial equality and social justice have had a long-term impact in the region.

The Rev. Andrew Schulze was a white pastor of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who began his ministry serving African-American mission churches in St. Louis, Missouri, Springfield, Illinois and Chicago. He spent his life teaching, preaching and acting to fight against every form of racism and

discrimination.

Karl Lutze worked side by side with Pastor Schulze as Executive Director of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America, which Schulze founded. Before coming to Valparaiso in 1959, Karl served as pastor of African-American Lutheran congregations in Muskogee and Tulsa, Oklahoma. He also held a half-time teaching appointment in Valparaiso University's Department of Theology until his retirement in 1991. In 1995 he was the co-recipient with Walt Reiner of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award.

Karl has been a member of the Project Neighbors Board since it evolved from the Valparaiso Builders Association more than a quarter century ago. We are proud to claim Karl and his wife Gail, also an active member of the PN board, as friends and partners.