



Project Neighbors

Respect & Encourage Community

Volume 13, issue 1

Ed Senne, Editor

Fall 2012

Neighbors' Educational Opportunities

Almost two years ago, Project Neighbors played an instrumental role in establishing Neighbors' Educational Opportunities (NEO), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing essential adult education and an alternative pathway to earning a high school diploma. Fast forward to the present and it is hard to believe how much NEO has truly accomplished. With the continuation of adult education services and with the opening of Neighbor's New Vistas High School, NEO is now firmly established as a provider of vital educational services in northwest Indiana.

NEO's adult education program serves 300 – 400 students



annually who enroll to learn English as a second language, study for the GED test, prepare for college, or study for the test required of high school graduation. NEO also runs an official GED testing site—the only one in Porter County—accessed by over 400 students each year. Students who have completed their high school coursework but who have not passed the required graduation exam also turn to NEO, where adult education teachers help them prepare for the test.

On August 16 New Vistas High School had its official opening ceremony, with Representative Pete Visclosky cut-

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Walt's Place: Programs and History

There's a building at 554 South Locust which has had many names and uses since its construction in 2001. Currently it bears the name HILLTOP TOO – WALT'S PLACE. It's a project of Hilltop Neighborhood House (HNH) Childcare Center, just over a block away. For a year or more, Jan Jones created and managed its programs. More recently, HNH Director, Jennifer Wright, recruited Sue Clemens, retired after many years of service at the Valpo Boys and Girls Club. Beginning in September 2011, Sue has been creating and running the programs there.

Sue and her crew of VU Work Study students and numerous volunteers have transformed Walt's Place into a hub of creative activity for the neighborhood's children and youth. Sue reports a mem-

bership of 60, with at least 20 showing up consistently, 3:30-5:30, M-F, for snacks, homework assistance, reading, and mentoring. While all that is happening during the day, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, computer training, and GED classes are going on in the evenings.

By 2001, Project Neighbors and its many partners had provided attractive, affordable housing and neighborly support for more than 43 families; started Hilltop Neighborhood House, a child care center and a free clinic (now HealthLinc); and built Maria Elena's restaurant (now Gabriellas). Walt Reiner and others agreed that the new Hilltop "village" still needed a Grocery Store and Laundromat.

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VU Honors Two of "Its Own"

Valparaiso University, at its May 20 conferring of degrees, bestowed its highest honor upon two of our Project Neighbors Board members, Loie Reiner, co-founder with her late husband Walt, of PN and Paul Schreiner, its current chairman and long-time guide and director of its work projects. Both were awarded the Doctor of Public Service Degree, while the rest of us Board members applauded: Bravo! Well deserved! Both are VU graduates, Loie in 1952 and Paul in 1970, and both have spent their lives to date in the Valparaiso community, exemplifying the ideals of service.

In the citation included in the commencement folder, Loie is described as having "a long history of service to Valparaiso University and the wider commu-



nity, reflecting a commitment to positive change, service, peace and justice, and the celebration of diversity." With her late husband Walt, she co-founded Valparaiso Builders Association (VBA) in 1968 and its successor organization Project Neighbors (PN) in 1984, both of which have been dedicated to the mission of assisting families in need of decent housing and a "hand up." Loie has always participated with this work in a very personal and energetic way. Even in her eighth decade, she readily takes on all kinds of tasks for PN, volunteers at Hilltop Neighborhood House (HNH) and at her church. Loie also attends every VU home basketball game, enthusiastically

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Walt's Place

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That's when Harvest Homes donated the labor for building our Village Market, and the Ramos family managed it. However, the Market had a few challenges: 1) it's location at the dead-end of Locust Street, and 2) PN's policy NOT to sell tobacco, lottery tickets, or alcohol. This resulted in the closing of the Market. Next PN turned the space over to neighborhood women for a food and clothing pantry.

After a while the building was remodeled to accommodate Porter County Family Counseling Center. When, a few years later, that agency decided to relocate, Loie Reiner remembers sharing the news with Deb Lambert, Director of HNH, and watching her light up. "Perfect!" she said, and lived just long enough to see the banner stretched across the front of 554 S. Locust, HILLTOP TOO – WALT'S PLACE.

Valparaiso Human Relations Council (VHRC)

The VHRC was established by Ordinance in 2011 to serve in an advisory capacity to the Mayor. The ten members—Deb Butterfield, Jim Doane, Bill Lewis, Larry Moore, Zahra Nwabara, Bill Oeding, Rick Soria, Jacob Williams, Beth Wrobel, and Ivan Bodensteiner, chair—were appointed by Mayor Costas in December 2011. Christine Hisick, Community & Staff Specialist for the City, serves as the staff person for the VHRC, and two high school students, Yamen Atassi and Magdalena Bonilla, serve as non-voting members. The VHRC meets on the fourth Tuesday of each month at 5:30 p.m. in City Hall Council Chambers. Its meetings are open to the public. The Council will not meet in December this year because of the Christmas holidays.

Current activities include planning an event by which the City will recognize MLK Day in January 2013; working with V.U. to address concerns expressed by minority and international students about troubling incidents they encounter in the community; and developing a program designed to promote a "business case" for diversity. Information about the VHRC, including the minutes of its meetings, is available on the City website.

African Americans Create a New Alliance

United for a Purpose, a Northwest Indiana organization, now more than ten years old, with a racially and ethnically diverse membership, has spawned a new project. It has created the **Northwest Indiana African American Alliance**, an organization of African Americans seeking to give voice to issues and problems which still affect them. Project Neighbors is very much in support of this new effort, and, in fact, has made start-up contributions as an expression of encouragement.

An article in the latest issue of the United for a Purpose newsletter reminds readers that things are not "getting better all the time" for African Americans in Northwest Indiana; in fact, it may be more accurate to say "our communities are falling back instead of pressing forward." The article asserts that it is time for African Americans themselves to hold local communities accountable to a progressive human rights standard. The author of this unsigned piece reminds readers that African Americans and other minorities are still facing unlawful and discriminatory traffic stops and evictions, and the institutions of our region are still lacking in diverse participation.

This new organization is calling for new strategies to address these problems. It appeals to African Americans and other minorities to support this project with memberships and donations. For more information call (219) 464-5052.

WVLP—Ten Years

In the year 2000 Project Neighbors applied to the Federal Communications Commission to build a lower power community radio station in Valparaiso. A year later, an FCC building permit was received and preparations were made to begin broadcasting. In October of 2002, WVLP – LP went on the air broadcasting with 100 watts of power, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In the past decade, we have seen the volunteer station evolve from recorded music to a full service community station. *The Morning Show* features an hour of news weekday mornings from 7 – 8:00 a.m. Several community affairs broadcasts are aired each week: *Conver-*

Good Water in Rural Mexico

Project Neighbors' work in Mexico is taking off. The Center for Appropriate Technology and Indigenous Sustainability (CATIS), recently organized a new not-for-profit organization to operate the programs there. It is called **CATIS Mexico** and is located near San Miguel de Allende, a four-hour drive northwest of Mexico City. As the Center is being built, its personnel hold workshops for local communities, as well as for regional and international groups, including engineering students from Mexico and the US. These workshops teach sustainable and affordable technologies for building systems, agriculture, water purification and alternative energy from waste products, as well as sustainable economic development.



In many poor farming communities in Mexico and throughout the world, people suffer from a lack of potable water. This means that diarrhea, cholera, hepatitis and many kinds of bacterial

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sations with Community Voices (Monday 7 -8:00 p.m.), *The Buzz* (Sunday 2 – 3:00 p.m.), *House Rap* (Monday 6 – 7:00 p.m.), *The Liberal Bias Media Hour* (Wednesday 6-7:00 p.m.), and *Out to Lunch* (Monday 12-1:00 p.m.) Local DJs host a diverse array of music shows, including rock, jazz, folk, classical, hip hop, country and blues. Music not heard on commercial radio is offered by hosts with a passion for that particular genre. (For a complete WVLP schedule, go to wvlp.org.)

Fully one quarter of the music WVLP plays is by local musicians. The mission of WVLP is to be a **local media**

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NEO, cont.

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ting the ribbon. On September 4, it opened its doors to 136 students. New Vistas is a public charter high school, open to any Indiana resident seeking to earn a high school diploma, no matter their age. New Vistas offers a Core 40 diploma like traditional high schools, but works with students who need a flexible, part-time, or evening schedule; a smaller, more personalized school environment, or a curriculum that is more relevant to their lives.

As New Vistas nears the end of its first trimester, 25 students are waiting in the wings to begin classes in the second trimester. Prospects for growth are excellent, reflecting the need for alternative pathways for high school completion.

There is a unique story that reflects the lives and experiences of NEO's high school and adult education students. Take Fred, a 20 year old who left school three years ago. Since then, he has worked steadily to support his family. When he heard about NEO last year, he enrolled in our credit program and began to take the classes he needed to graduate. This year, in addition to working two jobs, he travels 20 miles each day to New Vistas, volun-

VU Honors, cont.

urging the Crusaders to victory.

Paul Schreiner, co-owner of Design Construction, is cited by VU as "the social conscience of Trinity Lutheran Church in Valpo for more than two decades." Under his direction Trinity has built eight affordable houses, using primarily volunteer labor. Their model for these projects has been published by the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In partnership with Walt and Loie and the Board of Project Neighbors, his work has transformed the Hilltop Neighborhood from its depressed condition in the past to what it is now: the home of HNH Child Care Center, Walt's Place for after-school enrichment and Adult Education services, HealthLinc, a restaurant now called Gabriella's, and many handsomely remodeled and new housing units. These projects all involved construction and/or reconstruction, and Paul was always the coordinator of any work he was not doing himself.

Telling the whole story of why these

teers with disabled students as part of his Community Connections class, and was recently elected student council president following a week of "campaigning" (in a suit) for this position! Fred will be one of New Vistas first graduates. He has begun to meet with New Vistas' College-Bound counselor to finalize plans for transitioning to college in the spring. He is so grateful to NEO and New Vistas that he has pledged to come back after he graduates and serve as a mentor to other students. One can only imagine how different his life would have been without this alternative pathway. Fred's story is just one of the hundreds of stories ranging from tragic to inspirational.

The three story red brick building at 5391 Central Avenue in Portage has become a hub of hope for hundreds of students. Its marble staircases and solid oak doors reflect the quality of what is happening there. Each day, lives are slowly transformed, as students realize that the 2nd or 3rd or 4th chance is just what they needed to forge a more promising future.

For more information, visit NEO's website www.neoadulted.org.

Contributions to NEO
NEO has established the Ken Woodruff Memorial Scholarship Fund to assist students who are unable to pay for book rental, childcare, or GED testing fees. Your tax-deductible contributions will help offset these costs. <u>Address:</u> Neighbors' Educational Opportunities, 5391 Central Ave., Portage, IN 46368.
two members of our Board deserve this honor would require telling the whole story of VBA, PN, HNH, HealthLinc and a rejuvenated Hilltop Neighborhood. We applaud them, though it may take a while to address them as Doctor Loie and Doctor Paul.
Your Support is Needed
If you like what you read about in this newsletter, please consider supporting our work. We need your contributions to fulfill our mission. Make checks payable to Project Neighbors and send to 554 S. Locust St., Valparaiso, IN 46383.

PN Supports Women's Center

Dayspring Women's Center works to empower and serve women who are presently homeless, who have previously been homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless—and their children. The need for Dayspring became evident through the work of Open Arms Women's Overnight Shelter, a collaborative effort of churches and volunteers to provide homeless women shelter from 6 p.m. – 7 a.m. As 100s of volunteers worked with these women, it became clear that many faced personal challenges that made it difficult for them to navigate the systems that could help them. In addition, many of these women had no place to go during the day other than outdoors, regardless of weather conditions. They needed a place where they would have support for their journey towards stability and wholeness.

Dayspring will provide that support and compassion, giving them a safe place during the day, a healthy lunch, lockers for their possessions, a mailing address, and eventually showers and laundry. Just as importantly, they will have a personal support system that will help them grow.

Dayspring will provide case management, individual therapy, group classes, and job skills training. Participants will have access to computers where they can search for jobs, work on their resumes, and make job applications. Dayspring walks with these women, as they reach out into the community for such services as health care, mental health care, affordable housing, etc. The women will receive guidance and encouragement as they set goals and take steps to reach those goals.

Dayspring Women's Center is a program of Neighbors Corp, Inc. It is open Monday, Wednesday, & Friday from 8 a.m. - 2 p.m. As funding increases, hours of service will increase. It is located in the back of the Porter County Aging & Community Services Building at 1005 Campbell Street in Valparaiso.

Monetary donations are much needed. Please consider supporting us by sending a check to: Dayspring Women's Center, P.O. Box 212, Valparaiso, IN 46384. **Volunteers** are also needed. To learn more, call 219/510-5432.

Mexico, cont.

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infections abound. CATIS Mexico has created ceramic water filters treated with colloidal silver, which eliminate the dangers of these bacteria. These simple filters are fabricated from local materials fired in non-polluting kilns. With them, CATIS Mexico builds systems that can supply a family of six with sufficient potable water for their everyday needs for about \$30. These filters eliminate the need for these families to purchase over \$800 worth of five-gallon jugs of clean water per year. As CATIS Mexico grows, community groups will be trained in filter production and system construction, providing employment and local business opportunities, as well as clean water.

CATIS Mexico's goal is to be self-sufficient within 12-18 months and to distribute tens of thousands of these systems regionally and internationally. The 2013 business plan is for a budget of about \$75,000, \$50,000 of which will come from donations and sales of filters.

To participate in this effort, send a check made out to iCATIS (the "i" is for International) Mexico and note in the memo section that it is for "CATIS Mexico." Send to 850 W. Adams St, Unit 6E, Chicago, IL 60607-3086.

For more information contact George Terrell, george.terrell@yahoo.com, (773) 595-1820, or visit www.icatis.org.

To contact Project Neighbors:

By Mail: 554 S. Locust Street
Valparaiso, IN 46388
By Phone: (219) 241-0782

WVLP, cont.

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outlet: virtually all voices are residents of Valpo, and the talk shows offer a local perspective on both local and national issues. WVLP also imports several nationally produced programs: *Democracy Now* (news), *The Art of the Song* (creativity), *The Thomas Jefferson Hour* (history and political issues) and *Global Village* (world music).

We are always looking for people who want to be involved in community radio, on the air or behind the scenes. To explore volunteering, call the station between 8:00 and 12:00 noon Monday through Friday at 476-9000.

New Housing on Morgan Blvd

Ten adults and twenty three children! That's the current population of the former trash strewn, heavily wooded parcel of land just south of Union Street on the east side of South Morgan Blvd.

When Project Neighbors purchased this four-lot parcel of land in 2007, the vision was for a multiple story apartment building designed to serve perhaps ten families. However, because of building codes and financial considerations, Project Neighbors decided to build four duplexes on the land. One lot was sold to Habitat for Humanity, which built the first duplex at the southern end of the property (see photo). Over the next four years, Project Neighbors, in partnership with Trinity Lutheran Church of Valpo, the New Life Builders from Kouts, and lots of unaffiliated volunteers built the next three duplexes. Thanks to the hundreds of hours of volunteer labor, all eight



units are priced to be affordable, and all eight units have been leased to families with children.

We built houses, but the eight families that now occupy them have made

them into HOMES. These homes are new, well designed, energy efficient and cost between 60-70% of market value. The project was completed in 2011 and is an example of what can be done with a

clear vision, some guiding expertise and a community of volunteers with caring hearts, giving freely of their time and energy.

The City of Valparaiso contributed a retaining wall and paved alley on the eastern edge of the property, separating the residential land from historic Union Street Cemetery. All resident traffic flows through this alley, precluding the need to access the property from curved and busy Morgan Blvd.

Another House to Build

In the early 90's Walt Reiner bought 1505 Brown Street, a 100-year old house, for about \$35,000. Since that year the house has been occupied by a family with three children. In time, the kids grew up and left home. Eventually, mom and dad also opted to leave.

After a careful assessment of the condition of the house, it was determined that it was necessary to raze it and build a new, energy efficient house on that site. Board member and architect Jeff Lewis has designed a compact three bedroom cape cod for the site. The design calls for a basement, three bedrooms and a full bath on the second floor, kitchen, small dining room, living room, half bath and air lock foyer on the first floor.

At the time of this writing, the old house has been razed and removed, and the new house is framed and under roof, waiting to be finished by volunteers, led by Jeff Lewis, Paul Schreiner and Mike Willard. Most work will be done on successive Saturdays.



Project Neighbors Board

Paul Schreiner (President), Ivan Bodensteiner (Vice President), Sharon Mortensen (Treasurer), Erin Wasem (Secretary) Michelle Nix (Executive Director), Keith Chitwood, James Henderson, Gregory Jones, Jan Jones, Jeffrey Lewis, Bill Loeschke, Ted Ludwig, Gail Lutze, Karl Lutze, Lois Reiner, Rebecca Reiner, Ed Senne, George Terrell, Pat Terrell, Al Trost, Ron West.