



Project Neighbors

Respect & Encourage Community

WHY PROJECT NEIGHBORS? by Pat Terrell

Perhaps the best way to describe Project Neighbors is that it *responds*. It responds to the individual needs of those who have few options. It responds to systemic and institutional policies and practices that may impede justice and equity. It responds to building new ways to communicate and collaborate with others to create relationships and community.

Project Neighbors is not like most not-for-profit organizations. It does not have a narrow purpose but, rather, a broad focus tied to a mission of building a just and equitable community. The work is not achieved solely by paid staff but, instead, by a mixture of volunteers, staff, and board members. New ideas for work come from the board, staff, and members of the community, often by those who have benefitted from Project Neighbors activity in the past. And, while Project Neighbors always looks to work with civic bodies and institutions, Project Neighbors is willing to take on the powers-that-be in order to make change.

Project Neighbors has been a dominant force in Valparaiso for more than fifty years. During that time, the day-to-day focus has changed depending upon the opportunities, need, and interest of those willing to do the work. Creating housing well below market rate for families and people who need it has always been a central activity, but even that work has changed and expanded—rehabbing old houses, building new houses and duplexes, creating small efficiencies for single women, erecting a major residential facility for those recovering from substance abuse.

While housing is a major commitment of Project Neighbors, we have also taken on developing and implementing approaches to combatting racism in Valpo's institutions and policies. Project Neighbors has built and spun off new resources which have themselves become community institutions including WVLP Radio, Neighbors' Educational Opportunities, Hilltop Neighborhood House and, HealthLinc Community Health Center.

Finally, **Project Neighbors is a home** to people in our community who want to commit themselves to making Valparaiso a better place to live for everyone. It is a home to people who want to take the premise and practice of *people making their own change* to other communities (like Mexico and Ghana). It is a home for those who want to find support and help in initiating new ideas. It is a home for a broad and ever-growing group of people who find Project Neighbors to be a vehicle for building solid relationships and community. In fact...soon you will be hearing about an important new initiative being launched by Project Neighbors called the Freedom Recovery Fund that supports a platform of work to address racial equity in Valparaiso.

Thank you for being a part of Project Neighbors and building a more just and equitable community.

Find us at www.projectneighbors.org

 Project Neighbors

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INEQUALITY IN VALPARAISO

by Larry Baas

Few would argue with the success that the City of Valparaiso has had in developing the downtown and making the city a vibrant place for many to live and work. However, if one looks below the surface of some of the elegant trappings, you begin to see indications that not all have benefited equally from these enhancements—levels of inequality are rapidly increasing. The US Census provides data on the average household income in Valparaiso by quintiles. A quintile is achieved by dividing the population into 5 parts according to household income and then computing the average for each group. The Census also includes data on the average income of those in the top 5% of household incomes in the city.

The figure below presents these data from 2014 to 2019 for the City of Valparaiso. There are 6 lines on the graph. The bottom line indicates the average household income for those households in the lowest 20%. The next four lines indicate the next 4 quintiles. The top line indicates the average income of those in the top 5%. In 2019, the top 5% of the households averaged \$402,166, the top 20% averaged \$214,726, and the bottom 20% averaged \$12,857.

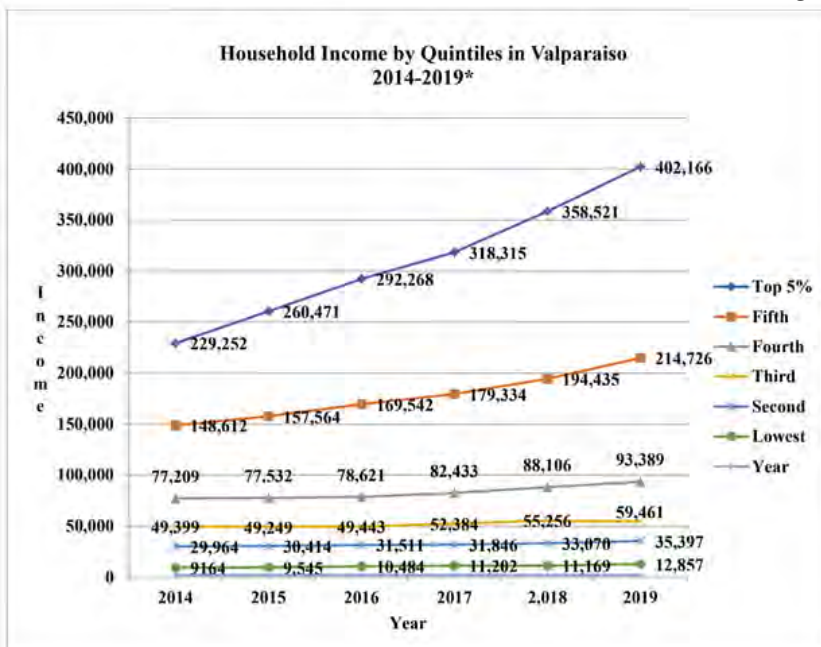
Obviously, there is a huge gap between the wealthiest households and the poorest. What is also clear is that the low- and mid-level incomes are relatively flat throughout this period, whereas the top two most wealthy categories (top 5% and top 20%) have increased substantially, particularly in the past several years, and thus widened the gap between rich and poor substantially. Note, for example, the gap between the top 5% and the lowest 20% was \$220,088 in 2014...it grew to \$389,309 in 2019.

Past discrepancies in wealth like this have economic, political, and, what has become abundantly clear as a result of the pandemic, health consequences. Focusing on the political, money is an important political resource for many reasons, but primarily it allows persons to apply significant and constant pressure on the political system to assure their interests are taken seriously.

In the area of housing, this allows the wealthiest to use money and position to convince those with authority that their projects need to be incentivized in order to be profitable, including receiving millions of dollars in tax abatements and substantial variances and exceptions from standards that allow them to build homes, condos, and apartments that only other affluent people like themselves can afford.

“those toward the lower end of the wealth continuum do not have the same resources to apply the same kind of pressure on the system...”

On the other hand, those toward the lower end of the wealth continuum do not have the same resources to apply the same kind of pressure on the system. As result, their projects are not incentivized and exceptions and variances which are automatic for the well-lawyered wealthy are denied to them or delayed by lawsuits or threats of lawsuits. As a result, they continue to struggle to find adequate housing for their families.



In the quest for obtaining housing for persons at all income levels, the solution to the problem created by the level of inequality in this community is either to increase the income of persons at lower levels—which means the wealthiest would have to be willing to share their wealth—or construct more housing at a level so that the less well-off can live more sustainable lives.

Research suggests that empathy and compassion are two of the casualties of increasing wealth, and recent experience indicates sharing wealth by increasing wages is not likely. The construction of more housing at lower income levels is the most likely solution. This is where organizations like Project Neighbors have played and will continue to play a critical role.

*Data derived from Census 5 year averages from American Community Survey Table B19081. Dollar amounts for that particular year.

MORNING BLACK MUSINGS

by Gregory A. Jones

It is uncommon to find a speaking and discussion platform that addresses the every day concerns of our African American communities. Frequently, people, white people, allies, and others want to know, "**What are they thinking?**" The "they" are often African American and Latinx communities and others who are most often viewed as the minorities within that community. Most people listen to aid their own agendas. Thankfully, I have been blessed with having the freedom to speak on issues that may or may not be on the minds of the local listening audience. The majority of that listening audience is white, Western Europeans. It is important to speak and give voice to issues that some people of color raise, even in environments like Valparaiso, Indiana, a typical predominantly white, American small town. Almost five years have gone by since we began this experiment in showcasing ideas and issues that reflect the concerns of African Americans on the Saturday 8:00 am show, **Morning Black: Building Leaders and Cultural Knowledge**.

It has been an interesting opportunity to gather people and ideas to address the diverse and myriad issues that are invoked out of the experiences of the under-presented communities that find their way to Valparaiso. My volunteer work as host/engineer for the show (with the station manager's help – thanks, Gregg) has been valuable toward giving voice to this kind of platform. We have been able to speak on many issues that are part of the vast concerns of our communities across this nation and into the global villages that are still impacted by policies and actions throughout nations around the world. There is no doubt as to the value of such a platform in addressing the barriers of silence, cultural bias, and ignorance that festers and infects efforts toward justice and equality between the communities within these nations and peoples. Hopefully such a platform as **Morning Black** can continue to dispel the misinformation and the nuances of discrimination that plague small town, white America as well as many giant populations within urban areas. We continue to support all genuine efforts and opportunities to address the lack of equity within and beyond our communities, as we seek to speak truth to power where ever that power reflects injustice, ignorance, and lack of compassionate concern. We seek to give voice to those who strive for justice for all people. We encourage everyone to listen without agenda.



Tune into Morning Black locally by listening to WVLP 103.1 FM or listen anywhere, anytime at wvlp.org

BUILDING A DREAM

by Paul Schreiner

We would often meet at the gym early, some time between 4:00 and 5:00 AM. Mitch Peters, attorney and chairman of the board of Respite House, Inc., was quick: lift a few weights and gone. I hung in a bit longer: on a treadmill or one of those big, inflated balls meant to ease back pain. We'd talk about nothing in particular until one day he said the 16 beds at Respite House were not near enough to meet the demand for services by recovering substance abusers. He claimed to have a waiting list of 80 to 100 applicants at all times. He wanted to build a Respite House II.

About that time—I think it was 2017—Project Neighbors had just purchased two adjacent lots on the west end of Union Street, just two doors east of Morgan Blvd. We intended to build a duplex on each lot, housing for four families. Mitch asked if we'd sell the property to Respite House. After some debate, the board of Project Neighbors agreed to sell the property at our cost to Respite House and manage the construction.

Jeff Lewis, president of Project Neighbors' board of directors, offered the architectural services of Shive-Hattery, the Chicago based architectural firm. The resultant conceptual drawings met Mitch's vision. We were off to the Board of Zoning Appeal. That was in November of 2018.



Respite House II - first floor framing.

Fundraising and final drawings took until fall of 2019. On a pleasant October day, we broke ground. Then winter did its thing. The foundation was completed in March of 2020. Dean Birky and his framing crew took over. April, May and June were spent framing the 6,500 square foot building. After the top level floor was completed, the community was invited to collectively raise the 80 foot long rear wall. It was a grand event seeing that massive wall raised by a line of 50 volunteers.



By June we began regular volunteer days. We worked six days per week from 8:00 AM until noon or a bit later doing minor framing, wiring, underlayment, siding, drywall finishing, floor tile, hanging doors, trimming windows, painting, and continuous clean-up. Every week 10 - 25 volunteers signed in and were assigned tasks. We had a great time! The final volunteer workdays extended into February, 2021. We built Respite House II for a little more than half price because of the volunteers and the contribution of local businesses. Here's a list:

- About **100 volunteers** over the course of construction.
- **Shive-Hattery** provided all architectural services.
- **The Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission** paid for the demolition of an uninhabitable house on the site.
- Framing crew, lead by **Dean Birky**, oversaw all flat work concrete.
- **Mike Willard** of **Willard Enterprises** contracted the plumbing at a sizable discount and supervised volunteers on wiring.
- **Northstar Stone** donated all stone veneer and mason **Mike Kuiper** installed the stone.
- **Iron Workers Local 395** made and installed the railing.

- **Ryan Fire Protection**, under the leadership of **Mike Lowe**, installed the entire fire suppression sprinkler system.
- **Larry Kleckner** of **Kleckner Interiors** donated all the drywall and the labor to hang and tape the same.
- Painter **Tim Connley** and **Connley Brothers Painting** provided paint labor.
- **Sherwin Williams** donated all the paint.
- **Keilman Tree Service** took down four trees.
- **The City of Valparaiso** took down two more trees.
- **The Porter County Master Gardeners** provided funds for landscaping.
- **Valparaiso University**, under the initiative of **Elizabeth Gingerich**, donated tables and chairs for the dining room.
- **St. Teresa of Avila** contributed funds for furnishings.
- **Marty Defoor** built the coat racks and installed all the blinds.
- **Boyd Asphalt** lead by **Charley Thorngren** will pave the parking area.

These contributors and the hundreds of volunteers made Respite House II possible. Respite House saves lives.

WHAT I LEARNED IN THAT HOUSE ~ anonymous ~

I first came to Respite House on August 12th, 2010, less than a year after the house opened. I was out on bond facing serious drug charges. I was facing 6-20 years. I came to the house in an attempt to show the courts that I could change, but that was all I wanted to do. To show the courts that I could change, but not actually change. Something happened to me though. I was shown a new way of life. I was shown that I really could live without drugs. 60 days after entering the house, I went to court for sentencing and was sentenced to prison for 6 years. What I learned in that house in that 60 days taught me so much. It completely changed the course, direction, and my purpose in life. I went to prison and continued to focus on my recovery and to use the experience to become the best version of myself that I could be. After my release, I came back to Respite House directly from prison and lived there for a year. I learned so much about myself, recovery, helping others, and not only how to live free from active addiction, but maintain sobriety, and to continually improve who I am and how to love myself and stop hating myself. Respite House became my home.

I lived many places in my 43 years of life, but Respite House is the only place I have ever called home. It is the only place where I feel completely and totally safe to be myself and feel accepted for who I am and who I am becoming. You know when you were growing up as a child and you would come home and smell your mother's or grandmother's home cooking and the world and all your troubles are lightened and you just feel at ease and at peace? That's what Respite House is to me every time I walk through those doors.

Life has not been easy. I have fallen hard a couple of times, but I always had a place to go and start over. To figure out where I went wrong and rebuild again. Respite House is a physical location, but it is so much more. It is an idea that every suffering addict deserves a chance, or two, or three. It's a beacon of hope that lets the world know that addicts should not be discarded. It is a reminder that you never know when the miracle will happen and the course of a seemingly hopeless life can completely change direction. The beauty in that is that every addict that comes to Respite House can not

WHAT I LEARNED IN THAT HOUSE cont.

only change in such a positive and inspiring way, but they can also help the next suffering addict, which in turn becomes the ripple effect and just keeps going. It is immeasurable how far that ripple will go. It may not always seem like this, but after a decade of being connected to Respite and living there a few times, I can say wholeheartedly that I have seen it time and time again. The principles and beliefs that are the foundation of Respite House are even stronger than the physical structure and it's what makes Respite House such an amazing and special place. The heart and soul of Respite is what saves lives. It's more than just a house. Respite II is built on the same principles and beliefs. The heart and soul of both houses is the unconditional love for the suffering addict and the belief that every addict has the ability to change. We just need the opportunity and someone to show us how. That is all it took for me and countless other former residents of Respite House. I am excited and honored to be a part of Respite II and I am looking forward to this next chapter of my life. I owe everything to Respite House.

HANDS, HEAD, AND HEART by Marek Wojtala

As I sit down to write about my time assisting with the build of Respite House II, I recall NPR sharing the CDC's report that May 2019 to May 2020 holds the record for most drug overdose deaths in a 12 month span. That is 81,230 U.S. residents. The overdose death rate increased as the Covid-19 pandemic set in, one major factor that led to the increase is the isolation that came with the pandemic.

As of September 30th, 2020, in Porter County, of the 348 resident deaths during the calendar year (the deadliest year in 19 years), 26 died by suicide and 24 died of an overdose. Unfortunately isolation and death has touched far too many people over the last 10 months, and just as terrible is the knowledge that there is much pain to come.

The feelings of isolation have been conjoined with a sense of powerlessness. As of March 1st, 16,180 Porter County residents have tested positive for Covid-19, and 259 residents have died. It is impossible for me to not view my experience in helping to build Respite House II through the lens of a disease that is the antithesis of everything Project Neighbors and Respite House stand for—that our community is stronger when we come together, love, and support each other, and that the work we do together makes us all better and stronger.

My own journey with building Respite II started in late July. I came to the worksite with relatively few skills, but within six months I learned so much that I would never have dreamed I would be trusted to do. This list includes but is not limited to: installing tile, insulation, drywall, door knobs, and painting just about everything that you would find in a house.

Marek tiling the floor; Valpo U student volunteers mulching the grounds; mounding sand & dirt in preparation for a concrete pour; installing siding.

Each day of volunteering meant a new skill for Paul to instruct us on, and then we would hit the ground running. There are three days of volunteering that are especially noteworthy for how they required me to use my hands, head, and heart like I had never before:

1

After my first Saturday of volunteering, I was able to convince my partner Kat to come with me. I promised her a task like painting or light landscaping. When we got there, we were greeted with words from Paul that I quickly learned to fear: "I got something you'll like."

I got something you'll like.

The high that day was 99 degrees and our task was to excavate around 2 feet of soil to install the 9 concrete steps leading up to the front door. This was hard ground. As we dug down we were forced to dig through tree limbs, compact dirt, and leftover bricks from the previous buildings. Somehow the seemingly gallons of sweat that Kat, myself, and our 2 digging partners Jack and Jimmy shed did nothing to soften the ground.

The only thing that made the work easier was the intimate and supportive conversation. I feel that at times we would be taking out mere grams of dirt, yet without fail, Paul would come around and state how big of a difference he was seeing and congratulate us on our hard work. I must admit that this 4 hours of deeply tiring manual labor scared me away from volunteering for a bit (at least until all the digging was done).



2

Many weeks of volunteering after my experience with excavating, I was once again greeted by Paul saying, "I got something you'll like." This time the front door needed painting. The front door is one of the first things people will notice from the street, and will serve as the threshold through which people would undergo the next phase of their recovery. The front door needed to look perfect to all who it greeted. That day happened to be Halloween, and I was faced with the scariest task of all—overcoming my horrible attention to detail. It took all my concentration to tape and paint the door. Paul continually checked on me and commented on my painting and the importance of this job. When I finished, all the volunteers gathered together, and I expected everyone to comment just how nice the door looked. Instead, Paul said politely, "Well, we can just repaint it next week." If that isn't a reminder that you can always do a better job and to not take yourself seriously, I don't know what is!

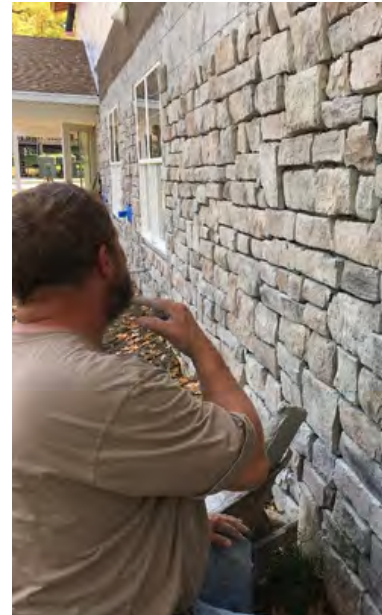
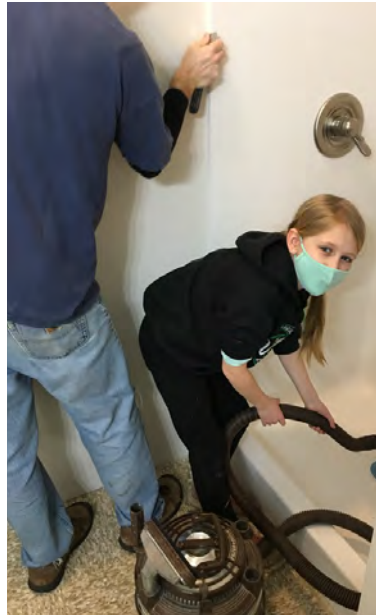


Sanding floors in preparation for tiling.

3

To celebrate the end of all our hard work, on the last day of volunteering we had a volunteer celebration of sorts. Mitch Peters came to speak, and Paul brought the group doughnuts as a way to reward what we had accomplished, but in the mind of this volunteer, the donuts were to replace the calories lost digging ditches or carrying 60lb boxes of tiles. More rewarding than the donuts were the powerful stories shared by Mitch of the difference the Respite Houses make. Mitch stated how every day of the year there are 80-100 men on the waiting list for a spot at Respite House. 40% of these men are incarcerated and unable to leave until a space opens up at one of the Respite Houses. Each person and minute of our time meant that Respite House II could open sooner and people could leave incarceration or continue their recovery that much sooner. This means the difference between life and death for those that have worked hard for a second chance.

If the mission itself isn't enough of a reason to volunteer, maybe the donuts will sweeten the deal. I look forward to seeing you at the next build!



There's always cleaning to be done; installing brick veneer.



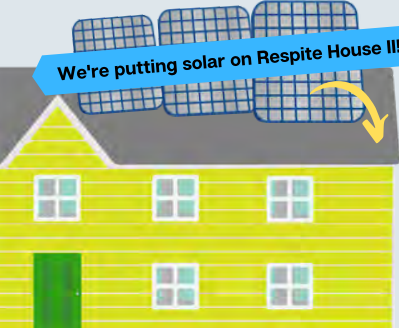
Chucking debris – a good job for all ages.



Respite House II – this house saves lives.

NEW INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION by Gilles Charriere

When Project Neighbors asked me if I would help install solar panels on the roof of the beautiful new Respite House that they just finished building, I immediately accepted. My son and I have installed a 24-panel system at the house where he lives and 30 panels on my own roof. For both projects, we did the research & installation ourselves so we could learn about



technical and financial aspects. We learned that the political climate dictates how long it takes to recover the initial investment. In most every case, solar panels will pay for themselves, and under certain conditions, solar will more than double the money invested.

A kilowatt-hour (kWh) is the quantity of electricity used by a 1000-watt device running for an hour. Each kilowatt-hour generated by a natural gas plant will release 0.91 pounds of CO2 into the atmosphere—that's 2.21 pounds per kilowatt-hour for a coal plant, perhaps like the one in our backyard in Michigan City. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), the US generation of electricity in the year 2019 caused the release of 1.72 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO2).

Our local electricity provider, NIPSCO, is progressively closing its coal plants as they have become too expensive to operate. As they search for ways to generate more electricity from wind and solar, I look at the untapped beautiful real estate of our roofs sitting under the sun. Solar installations can be connected to the grid and provide electricity to ourselves and our neighbors through agreements with the utility provider.

Surprisingly to some, the climate of Northwest Indiana is reasonably favorable to solar energy. Averaging year round, a solar panel will receive the equivalent of 4.4 hours of full sun each day.

This means that a 300-watt panel will generate 1320 watt-hour/day or 481.8 kWh/year. Our 30-panel project for Respite House II would therefore generate roughly 14,500 kWh and prevent almost 32,000 lbs of CO2 to be released each year.

As I am writing this article, I realize how broad the subject is and how there is so much more to talk about but, at a minimum, I want to touch on one more subject: transportation. In 2019, the US transportation sector accounted for 1,902 million metric tons of CO2. In just the last few years, 1.4 million plug-in electric cars have been sold. It's a relatively small number, but one quick glance at the exponential curve of sales may convince one that electric cars are likely to be the greatest number of cars in the near future. Unlike conventional cars, the fuel that powers electric cars can be provided by wind or sun.

Sometimes I like to imagine a time traveler from 1850 looking at our world today. I imagine her surprise at seeing light bulbs in every home, power lines, highways, gas stations at every corner. It gives me a sense of what humans have achieved in a relatively short time. Then I wonder what she will see if she traveled 150 years in the future – or even a mere 50 years. There is no doubt in my mind that we are in the early stages of a new industrial revolution, and, if we embrace it, it will be an exhilarating and rewarding journey for all.

Before/Beyond Solar:

While solar pays itself off over time, there are affordable options you can take to increase energy efficiency that are good for the environment & easier to initially afford. Here are 3 things in order of ease & price:

- improving home insulation, attic insulation;
- improving windows and other air/wind gaps;
- switching your gas heater to an air or ground heat pump.

CONFRONTING RACISM IN VALPARAISO by George Terrell

Allies Against Racism and White Supremacy (Allies) began just under 3 years ago with a series of monthly public forums to educate ourselves and our broader community about the nature, operation, and impact of racism, both locally and nationally, and to learn from and develop relationships with our neighbors, people of color, and other historically marginalized people. Over 200 people have participated in this effort and developed action initiatives. While Project Neighbors board members and staff have played significant roles in this work, Allies has drawn on the energies and talents of people from across the community.

Allies continues to offer guided discussions for churches and groups interested in exploring white privilege, white supremacy, and white fragility, as well as the structural nature of racism and anti-racist practice. There are ongoing workgroups focusing on these issues in the Valparaiso Community Schools (VCS) and with the Valparaiso Police Department. Here's more about these specific initiatives:

Workgroup on Confronting Racism in the Schools: Allies gathered stories and experiences related to racial bias and discrimination in the schools from students, parents, and

CONFRONTING RACISM cont.

teachers. This information was presented to the city's Human Relations Council in July and was formally conveyed as citizen input in the selection process for the new VCS Superintendent. A program on WVLP was dedicated to hearing student stories about the impact of racism on their own school experience. In August, Allies spoke to the School Board about racism in the schools and past frustrations in addressing these issues, resulting in a series of meetings with representatives from the school board and with the new Superintendent, Dr. Jim McCall. Dr. McCall has continued to be engaged in discussions and has stated his commitment to making racial equity and cultural competency a priority. In elaborating on his commitment, Dr. McCall talked about three priorities: (1) providing resources and curriculum with diverse perspectives and voices, including narratives from historically marginalized communities; (2) high quality professional training for all staff in cultural competency and implicit bias; and (3) diversifying professional staff in the schools.

To assist in meeting these goals, Allies has encouraged the Superintendent to engage with the Great Lakes Equity Center, which works free-of-charge with public school districts to help implement racial equity and social justice goals. Dr. McCall has started by inventorying and auditing the resources in VCS K-12 libraries and wants to create a process to include diverse perspectives in the curriculum development process.

Student members of Allies ask that a program and process be developed whereby students, parents, and other school and community members can report incidents of racism and bias and engage in facilitating resolutions. In the past when some people have raised issues of bias and racism, they have been ignored and felt like their voices have not been respected. While it may be difficult to listen to angry or frustrated voices, the information is important in resolving issues.

Dr. McCall has indicated his approach will continue to be open and transparent, he wants to hear from people directly when issues arise, and he understands the need for adopting a process to deal with racial incidents aimed at facilitating resolution and restorative justice. There are successful existing models, and Allies will follow up with Dr. McCall in hopes of developing a process that students and others feel safe in utilizing.

Allies will meet again with Dr. McCall this spring to follow up on proposed changes and processes regarding increased diversity in the materials and curriculum at all grade levels, professional development and implicit bias-training for staff, diversifying the professional teaching staff, and implementing processes for resolving problems that arise in the future.

Workgroup on Policing and Community Safety: After the killing of George Floyd, a meeting was held on June 30, 2020, with Valparaiso Police Department's (VPD) Chief Jeff Balon and Assistant Chief Mike DeHaven. The group included representatives from Northwest Indiana African American Alliance (NWIAAA) and others who had been meeting with VPD, including representatives from Allies, Project Neighbors, and the Human Relations Council. A broad agenda arising out of the national conversation about policy initiatives to end unwarranted police violence against African Americans was discussed, including:

- banning chokeholds and carotid blocks, except in narrow circumstances when use of deadly force is justified;
- implementing a de-escalation policy;
- developing a use of force continuum,
- imposing a "duty to intervene" policy if one officer sees another engaged in the use of excessive force, as well as a duty to report;
- initiating a policy barring shooting at fleeing felons and banning shooting at or from moving vehicles, except in certain limited situations;
- committing the department to continue to diversify the professional staff of the department; and
- training on implicit bias and cultural competency and related issues throughout the Department.

The VPD has since worked with CALEA, their accrediting agency, to adopt some policies in response to these requests. The Chief and this coalition agreed to meet again this spring to review recent policy changes and to set the agenda for going forward.

For more information on Allies or to become active in Allies, contact George at george.terrell@yahoo.com.



NEIGHBORS' EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES by Rebecca Reiner

Like it did elsewhere, COVID-19 descended on Neighbors' Educational Opportunities (NEO) on March 13, 2020, and has been a dominant factor since then. And while this pandemic has caused hardship, deep anxiety, and challenges, it has not stopped our programs, progress, or our commitment to building educational equity.

NEO's New Vistas High School and Adult Education students and staff have met this new reality with resiliency and resolution, creativity and commitment, and have risen to the demands of a hybrid model of teaching and learning. In June 2020, NEO graduated 198 students with a high school or high school equivalency (HSE = GED) diploma.

This fall, we added 5 new adult education satellite sites in Valparaiso, Lake Station, Gary, and East Chicago, and in the Porter County Jail, while continuing our partnership with Valparaiso Community Schools (V.A.L.E) and the Porter County Juvenile Service Center. We developed a "fast-track" class that has had a 95% success rate in graduating students with a High School Equivalency Diploma in just 8 days!

NEO formalized its commitment to equity and justice by establishing and funding a stakeholder-led committee that is leading school-wide trainings, events, initiatives, and change focused on building shared knowledge and implementing individual and system-wide change.

In November, 2020, NEO launched the NEO Energy Academy as we cut the ribbon on our new 1-acre solar field. The arrays, provided at no cost to NEO, will not only reduce our energy bills by 25%, but are a public display of NEO's focus issues of energy and sustainability—through education and training, community initiatives, and advocacy. While the pandemic continues to persist, so does NEO's commitment to our mission. Join us. Visit us in person, on Facebook, or on our website at www.neoadulted.org or contact Executive Director Rebecca Reiner at rreiner@neoadulted.org.



NEO's New Vistas High School Energy Ambassadors conducting tours of NEO's solar array.

CAMINOS DE AGUA by Dylan Terrell

Caminos de Agua is a small NGO based in San Miguel de Allende in Central Mexico, working in partnership with at-risk communities to obtain adequate supplies of safe water. This small, scrappy nonprofit has a unique and storied connection to Project Neighbors (PN). Back in 2009, PN board member, George Terrell, started the Chiapas Building Project in Southern Mexico under the umbrella of Project Neighbors and with a goal of bringing sustainable construction practices to indigenous communities not far from the Guatemalan border. Through a long and winding tale, this PN offshoot eventually joined forces with other like-minded individuals and organizations in 2009—moving their focus towards Central Mexico where Pat and George's son, and Walt and Lois Reiner's grandson, Dylan Terrell, ultimately founded Caminos de Agua.

Today, Caminos de Agua (Caminos) is a diverse team made up of 13 full-time employees, a multidisciplinary board of directors, plus several graduate-level engineering and public interest interns at any given moment. Caminos is a mix of immigrant residents and Mexicans, technologists and community organizers, researchers and educators—united by a concern for public health and welfare.

The Caminos team is augmented by a satellite network of technical advisors and researchers from around the world—all contributing to one shared organizational mission of improving human health and community well-being through adequate and affordable access to clean water. Caminos achieves its mission through four main strategies:

1. Developing innovative low-cost solutions to technical water quality and scarcity challenges.
2. Creating access to clean water with communities at-risk, namely through the installation of rainwater harvesting systems, treatment plants, and other solutions.
3. Raising awareness of people and communities regarding local and global water challenges through its water quality monitoring program and development of educational materials and programs.
4. Increasing engagement and assisting other stakeholders towards a common purpose by partnering with local communities, NGOs, grassroots organizations as well as municipal, state, and federal government agencies to address severe water quality and scarcity issues and impact public policy.



Local women assembling a component of a rainwater harvesting system on a Caminos de Agua project.



Local community residents come together with Caminos de Agua to build a much-needed rainwater harvesting system.

CAMINOS cont.

Caminos de Agua is a unique organization in that it is both a technology-based nonprofit, providing innovative low-tech engineering solutions to complex water challenges, and an environmental social service agency that has ten years of experience successfully engaging with communities to mitigate their water issues. The organization's approach, which involves high levels of community participation, leads to more successful projects than top-down methods typically employed by governments and other institutions.



Caminos de Agua staff and local girl test out a new drinking water system at a rural elementary school.

This year, Caminos is celebrating its 10th anniversary while taking on its most massive and ambitious project to date. Over the next three years, Caminos will be expanding its work to more than 30 new rural villages throughout Central Mexico—implementing dozens of workshops and educational programs and building hundreds of water and sanitation solutions.

You can learn more about Caminos' work, follow their progress, and sign up for their email list on their website at www.caminosdeagua.org.

ABC AT NOON by Larry Baas

The Agenda for a Better Community—ABC—came about as a result of Project Neighbors' retreat where members reflected on how well the City of Valparaiso was doing on a variety of issues. The consensus was that the City had done a good job in some areas, like revitalizing downtown, but was lacking in other areas. That conclusion led to expanding the group to include other civic minded persons, and, over time, that group developed a set of issues labeled an Agenda for a Better Community.

1. Assure a Welcoming Community for All People,
2. Assure the Availability of Quality Housing for Persons at All Income Levels,
3. Assure a Healthy Community,
4. Assure a Strong and Equitable Economy,
5. Assure that All Residents have Access to Comprehensive Educational Opportunities,
6. Assure a Sustainable Environment,
7. Assure a Safe Community for All Residents.

As one vehicle to implement the Agenda for a Better Community, Paul Schreiner and Larry Baas created a program entitled *ABC at Noon* on WVLP (103.1 FM and streaming at WVLP.org). An original version of the program airs on every other Monday at noon and replays Tuesdays at 5 and again on the following Monday at noon. Initially the program addressed the issues in the Agenda, but during the 2018 and 2020 elections the focus changed to providing a platform for local candidates to address concerns considered in the ABC as well as other issues. All candidates running for local political offices were invited to be interviewed on WVLP. Eventually, 19 of the candidates were interviewed and each of these interviews were replayed at least 4 times prior to the election. This provided the public a rare opportunity to hear a detailed discussion of issues with each of the political candidates and provide citizens important information to make informed decisions.

ABC AT NOON cont.

Since the election, the focus of the program has continued to be on reporting on local political activities. Specifically, it has been expanded to include a thorough discussion of the most recent city council meetings, as reported by Jack Ballentine. Ballentine was added to the program and did an extraordinary job of reporting in detail on what was happening at City Council meetings and the implications of these actions. Jack has now moved to St. Louis and Larry has temporarily taken over the job, but we are looking for another volunteer to take on the task of reporting on City Council meetings and other activities.

In addition, the overall format of the program has been modified somewhat. While issues related to the ABC are considered, the emphasis is on a review of the most recent City Council meetings, a guest editorial from us or one of our listeners on an issue of their choice, often followed by a discussion of some of the basics of local government or a specific ABC agenda issue.

If you are interested in becoming our “reporter” and/or interested in presenting your editorial perspective on some issue, you can call the WVLP station at 219-476-9000 or email Larry Baas at Larry.Baas@valpo.edu. We would be happy to hear from you. A complete version of the ABC is available at ABCValpo.org.

Project Neighbors
454 College Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383
www.projectneighbors.org
219-465-3131

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SUPPORT PROJECT NEIGHBORS

One year ago, the world shut down in the midst of a pandemic, and the needs of those less fortunate only got worse. The stress of daily life was compounded by new and unprecedented challenges. I'm proud to say we are here, we are strong, and we are motivated. The stories in this newsletter represent the impact a group of passionate individuals and an army of volunteers can have in a community. We strongly believe that we have the responsibility to advocate for those that don't seem to be seen or heard in society, and educate those who have the loudest voices. Our work goes far beyond providing shelter; it is about providing opportunity and capacity, and simply being good neighbors. We can't do this alone, and thankfully we haven't had to. Our supporters and volunteers are the heart of this organization and have kept the dream alive for over 50 years. I believe that for every dollar given, or hour spent working, the return on investment is exponential.

Please consider supporting Project Neighbor in your annual giving, and with your volunteerism. Both will be an incredibly rewarding experience, and will make a difference for many in our community. Give online at **projectneighbors.org** or by sending a check to **Project Neighbors, 454 College Ave., Valparaiso, IN 46383.**

Thank you for the many ways you support our work, and, near or far, thank you for being a good neighbor.

Jeff Lewis
President, Project Neighbors

BOARD MEMBERS

- Tina Allen-Abulhassan — Supplemental Instructor, Ivy Tech Community College; ESL Teacher, Whales English (China); Member, NWIAAA
- Larry Baas — Senior Research Professor of Political Science, Valparaiso University
- Angela Coleman — Member, Northwest Indiana African American Alliance
- Jan Jones — Community Member
- Marjorie Leoschke — Community Member
- Byron Martin — Interim Assistant Provost for Inclusion and Retention, Valparaiso University
- Rebecca Reiner — Executive Director, Neighbors' Educational Opportunities, Inc.
- Ed Senne — Founding Director of Hilltop Neighborhood House and Hilltop Health Center (now Healthline); Associate Professor Emeritus of Theology, Valparaiso University
- George Terrell — Coordinator, Allies Against Racism & White Supremacy; Board Member, Caminos de Agua, ABCD Institute, and NWIAAA.
- Pat Terrell — Former Deputy Chief of the Cook County Health and Hospital System in Chicago and retired VP of a national health care consulting firm focused on providing care for vulnerable populations and communities
- Liz Wuerffel — Community Member

