

Porter County Aging & Community Services Inc.
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Volunteer tackles food insecurity with deliveries

Kathy Conn has been embracing her nickname since 2013.

That is when she began delivering bread, sheet cakes, cookies, pies and more to non-profits in Northwest Indiana. Anyone who visits these organizations can grab these items and enjoy.



"I live on a lake stocked with fish and would get bread from the Hostess outlet to feed my wildlife," Conn says. "When it went out of business, I approached Strack & Van Til on U.S. 30 and bought their day-old bread."

When winter came, she still continued to collect the items to help maintain that relationship. With more and more food items, she decided to start delivering them to area non-profits.

"Once I got started, one place would tell me about another," she said.

Today, she drops off goodies to such agencies as PCACS, Alice's Halfway House for Women, New

Creation Men's Center and Respite House, all in Valparaiso, as well as Sand Castle Shelter in Michigan City. She makes deliveries four days a week.

"When I first started, I was doing it every day and my garage started looking like a grocery store as you have to sort and box everything. It was getting out of hand," she says.

She connected with the Salvation Army, which took over accepting food items three days a week.

A memory that stands out is when she saw a little boy clutching a sheet cake that she had just dropped off at the Salvation Army as a reminder of the scope of homelessness in the region.

"When we say homeless people, there's children too," she says. "Homeless children still go to school, have birthdays, graduate ... When I saw him carrying that cake, he had the biggest smile on his face."

Bringing food and goodies to those who need assistance is a special component of Conn's life as she has faced pain on a daily basis since a car accident in 1995.

"It's a form of therapy to me. I am going to do this until I can't anymore."

In Memory

Josephine Purevich, who was part of our agency for more than 25 years, has passed away. She led our former Hebron Senior Center as director before retiring in 2016. "I enjoy being with people, mingling and socializing," she said at the time.

Alexander Purevich III shared with us: "One thing that will stick with me the rest of my days was looking in my rearview mirror, and being unable to see the end of the funeral procession. It's amazing to see how many lives my mother touched."

For more information on the services provided by PCACS, contact:
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PCACS is proud to be a member agency of the United Way of Porter County

Volunteers, devoted team vital to another stellar year of impact

The mission of Porter County Aging and Community Services continues to be buoyed by devoted volunteers, caring staff and dedicated board members.

“Our volunteers are vital to our programs and how much we are able to impact our communities,” said PCACS Executive Director Bruce Lindner at the 2019 annual meeting. “The number of hours they put in is phenomenal. We truly could not do this without them.”

“I love getting up everyday and having a shared purpose that we can all work toward and help those in our communities who really need it.”

“The imprint of volunteers can be seen in so many of the programs that PCACS administers,” Lindner said.

The Energy Assistance Program is supported by long-time volunteers Gail Galvan, Inge Nimtz, Alexis Brandt and Dorothea Price. This year the program was able to support even more clients with their energy bills.

“Having the same knowledgeable volunteers work with clients on this program year after year allows us to continually provide the type of service we strive for every season,” Lindner said. “Their continued commitment to this role shines through and elevates the experience of those in need while making the process as smooth as possible.”

PCACS sponsors SHIP, which also relies on faithful volunteers who can help seniors navigate the world of Medicare.

“We can help with anything related to Medicare,” said SHIP volunteer and coordinator Ginger Brockwehl.

“During the open enrollment period in the fall, we encourage everyone on Medicare to review their plan and make sure they have the best coverage for the year.”

Brockwehl emphasizes that the volunteers, which also include Deborah Brann and Jim Mooney, are available year-round to meet with any seniors who have questions. The team is also available to speak to organizations.



PCACS board president Ethan Lowe, left, and PCACS executive director Bruce Lindner go over last year's impact at the agency's annual meeting.

“The ramp program has continued to ramp up because of organizations that come together to offer their time and talents,” Lindner said.

“The UAW/Ford Community Service team, Thrivent for Lutherans, Habitat for Humanity, Task Force Tips and recently added partner organization Valparaiso Noon Kiwanis Club have boosted the program to record numbers year after year,” Lindner said.

The ramp program, launched in 2007, is based in the principle that accessing a home can make a huge impact on those facing mobility challenges as well as their caregivers. Wood or steel structures can ease the burden of movement while leaving and entering a home.

“Our funding as well as skilled and loyal volunteers have us on track to help more and more community members,” Lindner said.

Hard-working staff members help PCACS meet its mission, including Deputy Director Judy Peracki, Section 8 Housing Director Valerie Martinez, Transportation Director Flo Snuffer and Carol Hammond, with the EAP.

“Our long-term team members are not only experts at working within these programs and providing stellar service, but they also have the essential element of passion for our community that makes such a difference in our ability to make an impact,” Lindner said.

New board members help add fresh insight to mission, goals of agency

The PCACS board is essential to the agency's continued efforts to serve Porter County. Board members offer their time to help guide the agency toward its best path in the future.



Jeffrey S. Wrage

The board has many members who have taken on the role for years, including Diane Bates, Cathy Ellis, George Iemmolo, Barb Kubiszak, Michael Lipp, Ethan Lowe, Rondi Wightman, Kimberly Wiseman and Porter County Council member Sylvia Graham.

“Their knowledge of PCACS will blend in a beneficial way with new board members,” said PCACS Executive Director Bruce Lindner.



Don Ensign



Carla Patino-Davis

Joining the board are Jeffrey S. Wrage, an attorney at Blachly, Tabor, Bozik & Hartman; Don Ensign, ArcelorMittal retiree; and Carla Patino-Davis, Duneland Family YMCA membership director.

“We welcome a different perspective from our new board members who bring their own experiences, skills and views of our communities,” Lindner said. “By bringing together all of our board members toward a shared goal, we look forward to seeing what additional avenues we can explore to positively impact our communities in the future.”

Ensign has deep roots in Porter County with family members dating back more than 120 years. He has served on all of Hebron's appointed boards.

Patino-Davis was born and raised in Valparaiso and has been part of the YMCA family since 1998.

Community programs' mark by the numbers

PCACS assists community members in need with a mix of essential programs.

The annual meeting offers an opportunity to spotlight the data of how many individuals are affected by this crucial assistance.

Transportation: 260 new clients, 25,353 one-way trips, 104 average trips per day, 192,794 total passenger miles

Energy Assistance: 1170 clients served including 435 elderly and 325 disabled, \$622,070 paid to utility companies

Section 8 Housing: 347 active clients

Ramp: 24 ramps completed, new partner Valparaiso Noon Kiwanis Club added

State Health Insurance Program: More than 200 clients served during the open enrollment period in the fall

Medicare: 45 applications submitted for savings program and 14 for Medicare Part D Extra Help, \$5,200 in funding received

United Way Emergency Assistance grant: 64 clients served with \$35,000, mortgage or rent and housing repairs and items top needs fulfilled

Partnerships: I Support the Girls connects women to underwear, bras, feminine hygiene products and Changing Footprints provides gently used shoes