

community action

.....> *family matters*
summer 2002



A Civil War Target then, A Haven Now

Housing Conversion Finalized on Indiana Cotton Mill* by Delora Hartsock

During the Civil War, the Indiana Cotton Mill at Cannelton caught the eye of an assailant, and the building still bears the scars from the cannon ball's impact. The massive

structure withstood those attempts at destruction.

A number of years ago, developers began eyeballing the old cotton mill alongside the Ohio River. And today that old structure – with the assistance of

\$8.2 million and several years of renovations – has become the new focus for about seventy families.

At a special dedication ceremony early this summer, visitors could still see the *continued on pg. 2*



The new Cotton Mill Apartment building has been reborn from the Old Cannelton Cotton Mill, thanks to a long list of contributors.

* See Community Action/Family Matters, Fall 2000 Issue

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affordable housing for Cannelton residents

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cont. from front cover

old mark from the cannon ball, now preserved and encased for the sake of historians, as tenants now call the building their home.

The old cotton mill today is one of Indiana's rarest historic sites: It is among the few Hoosier contributions on the list of National Historic Landmarks. So a number of organizations interested in saving the old structure pitched in and made it possible for Executive Director Larry Kleeman and other folks at the Lincoln Hills Development Corp. to turn the long-neglected and vacant monstrosity into an

apartment complex. Kleeman said that a number of federal, state and local organizations each made substantial contributions to make the structure useful again. And he hopes it will serve as a catalyst for more development in the vicinity. With high unemployment a common occurrence, the Perry County town and its surrounding area could use it.

The cotton mill could serve as a bit of a microcosm of what's been going on in the Perry County area for many years – a rather extended struggle that, hopefully, is turning toward a bright

future. The building ceased operations as a cotton mill in 1954 and then sat empty for many years. Several attempts during the past three decades failed to return it to any useful purpose.

Then the Lincoln Hills group stepped up in 1999 and purchased the property, going on faith that it might be able to find funding to turn it into an apartment house. Millions of dollars and numerous cooperative efforts later, it is reality.

Lincoln Hills was able to sell historic tax credits and low income housing tax credits to a private



Left to Right: State Senator Richard D. Young Jr., District 47, State Representative Russ Stilwell, District 74 Larry Kleeman, Executive Director, Lincoln Hills Development Corp., standing in front of the new sign for the apartments in Cannelton.

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- a reduction of poverty
- the revitalization of low-income communities
- empowerment of the low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient

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investor. The historic tax credits were available because the Cotton Mill is a registered National Historic Landmark and all work was done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic

Challenge grant, an Indiana Department of Natural Resources Hometown Indiana grant, Build Indiana (lottery) Funds, state tax credits through the Indiana Department of Commerce Neighborhood Assistance program (NAP), a Lilly Endowment grant through the Perry County Community Foundation, and a ten

comments thus far, Kleeman said.

The building, which was obviously "structurally well-designed and constructed" to withstand the Civil War blast and still stand today after years of neglect, boasts about 70,000-square-feet of interior. The apartments, which range from efficiency apartments of about 400 square feet of living space to three-bedroom units of approximately 1,100 square feet, are leased at rates based on income guidelines. Tenant households must not exceed 60% of the area median income.

He said that a few of the new tenants have shared stories of relatives who worked in the building when it was still a cotton mill. "We even had some people who worked on the construction (renovation) who said their grandparents worked there."

"It's been a real community development project. There was, and is, community support for the building," Kleeman said, adding that he hopes additional development projects will follow.

"I like to tell people that we turned a liability into an asset" by renovating the old building. "Hopefully, it will continue to service the community for a long time to come." ■



Left, State Representative Dennis Oxley II, District 73 and right, Larry Kleeman, Executive Director, Lincoln Hills Development Corp.

Buildings. The low income housing tax credits were awarded by the Indiana Housing Finance Authority (IHFA). IHFA also provided HOME funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as well as a low interest loan from the Indiana Housing Trust Fund.

Through the Bloomfield State Bank, Lincoln Hills was able to secure a Federal Home Loan Bank of Indianapolis Affordable Housing Program (AHP) grant. Bloomfield State Bank was also instrumental in arranging construction loan financing and is providing the permanent loan.

Other funding included a Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service as well as a

(10) year abatement of property taxes by the City of Cannelton. With a quick look at that long list, one can understand why it took several years to make the project's plans a formality, and then for Brandt Construction Inc. of Indianapolis to create the new reality that now stands for the new occupants.

Once the word was out, though, that tenants were sought, it did not take long to get the facility rented out, Kleeman said.

"Evidently the need (for good, affordable housing in the area) was even greater than we anticipated," he said. "Demand has been a little bit bigger than we anticipated."

The folks who now occupy the old cotton mill, as well as the general public, have provided "very positive"

the old cotton mill is now one of indiana's rarest historic sites & is on the list of national historic landmarks

bridge over troubled wastewater

by Jacqui Bauer

Indiana Rural Community Assistance Program

~ A project to expand small community solutions ~

Aside from an inordinate number of basketball fanatics, a bevy of loud, fast cars, and an obscure state mascot (what's a Hoosier?), Indiana is like most other states: lots of needs, and not enough resources to take care of them all. And like in many other places, the needs of rural communities—particularly those involving wastewater disposal—tend to fall at the bottom of the priority list.

Even where the wherewithal exists to address wastewater problems, small communities have a limited ability to complete projects successfully. While financial assistance programs have enabled many larger communities to address their wastewater problems, it is becoming increasingly evident that small communities, particularly those with fewer than 200 households, face unique challenges that make their problems more difficult to eliminate. In particular, these small communities face the barriers of insufficient resources, high per-household cost, a lack of the political infrastructure necessary to



RCAP Technical Assistance Provider Richard Wise (foreground) works with the Indiana State Department of Health, the local department of health, and local residents to evaluate the soil at a proposed treatment site for on-site treatment or a package plant.

pursue funding, and limited awareness of the need for wastewater treatment.

And even though thousands of small communities are still not

in compliance with the Clean Water Act, federal funding for infrastructure projects has been cut in half since the 1970's. Without a long-term plan to address these barriers, Indiana and most other states could find their ability to complete effective projects in smaller communities increasingly impaired.

One organization that witnesses the consequences of current policies on a day-to-day basis is the Rural Community Assistance Program, a nationwide network of non-profit entities providing free technical assistance to rural communities. In an effort to develop a comprehensive plan to address small community wastewater problems in the State of Indiana, and in the hopes that such a plan would benefit rural communities across the country, the Indiana RCAP recently applied for and was awarded a Section 104(b)(3) Watershed Management Grant.

The stated goal of the 104(b)(3) program is to develop, implement and demonstrate "new concepts or

requirements that will improve the effectiveness of the NPDES permit program”.

The Indiana project proposes to accomplish this goal by providing the state with a plan to eliminate illegal wastewater discharges from extremely small communities, which are largely unregulated by the NPDES program.

The project will be carried out in two phases. The first phase will focus on research and development of methods to reduce the financial and administrative barriers for small communities as they try to implement their wastewater solutions. To date, the following methods have been identified for research:

1. Research the feasibility of lowering the barriers to the use of lower-cost, alternative technologies (such as wetlands, lagoons, or media filters). One possibility would be to allow small dischargers to comply with less stringent discharge limits through defined variances. In the course of examining this topic, the Indiana RCAP will evaluate the regulatory approach to water quality standards and alternative technologies in other states.
2. Investigate the use of “self-help” techniques for implementing large-scale projects in small communities. “Self-help” greatly increases community participation and the use of community resources in order to decrease reliance

on outside help, thus lowering project costs. While this approach has been utilized in other states, it has never been used in Indiana. The Indiana project will research the liability, funding, and other issues associated with organizing a self-help project, especially by collaborating with individuals in other states who have experience in this area.

3. Evaluate the feasibility of implementing sewer utility bill subsidies for lower income or elderly residents, in the manner of the Energy Assistance programs for gas and electric bills.



RCAP's projects focus on eliminating raw sewage discharges like this one in Rush County. In many areas, wastewater flows untreated from homes and businesses. Untreated wastewater can cause nutrient pollution, spread pathogens, cause fishkills, and lead to a whole host of other problems.

4. Identify and research methods of increasing homeowner awareness of wastewater impacts. Increased awareness of the health and environmental impacts of sewage could increase the willingness of Indiana homeowners to pay for sewage treatment. By pairing cost-reduction efforts with educational efforts, the state may be able to bridge the gap between expensive infrastructure projects and limited community resources.
5. Investigate other measures for reducing financial and administrative cost to communities.

During the second phase, the Indiana RCAP will initiate pilot wastewater projects in several communities to serve as models for the measures identified in Phase One. For example, a closely knit, highly active community might serve as a potential model for a pilot self-help project. For a pilot project to assess the feasibility of alternative technologies, a community with available land and suitable soil might be selected.

To assist in our research, the Indiana RCAP is interested in nationwide input on the following questions:

1. Are there subsidy programs that you know of to assist low-income and/or elderly customers with sewer and/or water bills? How are these structured and funded?
2. What creative cost-reduction methods are you aware of that could be applied to water and wastewater projects?

3. In your opinion, what factors make the difference between communities that complete successful wastewater projects and those that do not?

The results of this research will be published in April of 2004. Individuals with information on any of these topics or with questions about the project are encouraged to contact Jacqui Bauer of the Indiana Rural Community Assistance Program at (800) 382-9895 or via email at: jbauer@incap.org. ■

Kids & seniors alike find a lot to do every day in Michigan City

By Delora Hartsock

When school lets out for the summer and parents are at work all day, what's a kid to do?

Well, when it comes to Michigan City, there's plenty.

Through programs supported by the North Central Community Action since 1966, youngsters can find good, productive fun at a couple of facilities, where they can meet up with friends and work on art or other projects, and participate in a various number of activities.

Dan Pishkur, Executive Director at North Central, said the facilities have decreased in number, from five to two over the years due to budget constraints. But the need remains.

"The number of people we service has stayed about the same, so I don't think the demand or need have decreased," Pishkur said.

The neighborhood centers are situated on the east and west sides of Michigan City, areas where there is a greater concentration of socio-economic need, Pishkur said. The eastside facility houses programs for youth, as well as a police substation, while the westside building supports youth programs as well as some senior citizen programs.

The Westside Neighborhood Center provides a senior nutrition site, where coordinator Madeline Smrt has been serving lunch to the elderly in her neighborhood the past 36 years. She also lines up games, speakers, social activities, shopping and entertainment trips and community meetings.

In addition Smrt also helps set up activities and supervise adults who oversee the facility's summer activities

The activities help them "learn to interact with other kids and adults" and in turn creates a "better attitude," McFerson said. Additionally, it helps free up some time for her, too. "I work evenings, and this way I have the mornings free," she explained.

Pishkur said that through the 1980s, five such facilities existed in Michigan City. But funding (from federal, state and local sources) had become



Michigan City's eastside neighborhood center was named in honor of former Executive Director, Emmet D. Wise

for youngsters who vary in age from 6 to 17. Smrt said that staffing assistance from the local Boys and Girls Club helped make this summer's programs a success, and that the arrangement "has been great for the seniors."

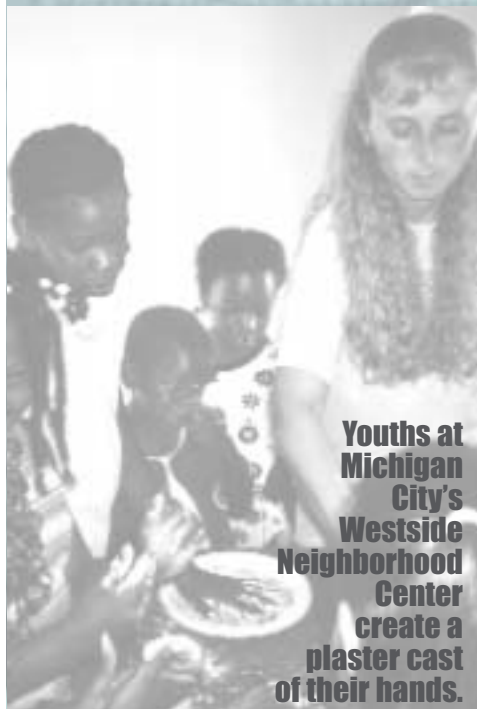
Similar raves come from a variety of people, including Rachel Fly, who directs the program at the Community Action Program's eastside facility, named the Emmet D. Wise Neighborhood Center in honor of a former longtime North Central director.

"We have some who have been coming here since they were little kids," Fly said. Adds Monica McFerson, who is the parent or guardian to five of the eastside participants: "It gives them something to do in the summertime - and it keeps them out of trouble."

scarcer over the ensuing years. Consequently, three facilities were closed.

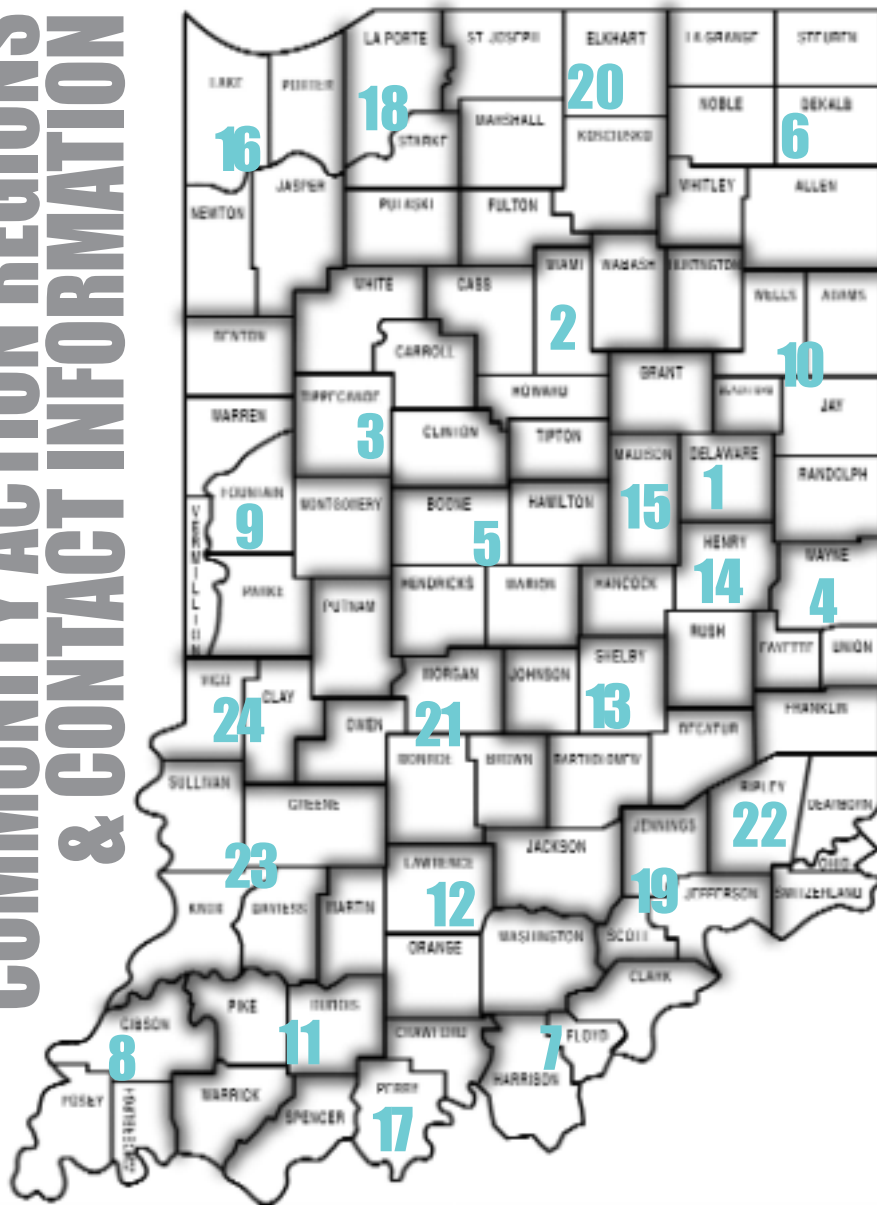
Where the two facilities remain, youths participate in various games; arts and crafts activities; and trips to nearby beaches, swimming pools, libraries or parks. Good behavior and cooperation are occasionally rewarded, sometimes with trips to places as far away as Chicago museums or baseball games, Cedar Point in Sandusky, Ohio, and the Children's Museum and Black Expo in Indianapolis. Lunch is provided daily.

Most of the expenses, such as transportation and entry to the games or events, are provided by the Community Action program, he said, to allow them to experience things that many people might take for granted. The only money



Youths at Michigan City's Westside Neighborhood Center create a plaster cast of their hands.

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the children's families need to provide is for souvenirs and the like.

"We try to involve them in activities that they might not normally get to do," Pishkur said.

Pishkur said that, on any given day, as many as 75-100 people might participate at the Westside facility,

including an average of 35-40 senior citizens and 40-50 kids.

The Wise Neighborhood Center has a similar number of youths show up each day. No senior citizen activities are currently housed there, but Pishkur said he still holds out hope to establish a senior nutrition site there someday. That facility

does offer some year-round activities, however. An after-school program is based there when school is in session.



Teens play a game during a hot summer day at the center.

Both the eastside and westside facilities formerly housed city fire stations, and the city donated them when the fire department outgrew the buildings. With the assistance of some Build Indiana funds,

Local Enrichment Corp. funds (proceeds from the riverboat casinos), and the Urban Enterprise Association, both buildings were remodeled to serve the new clientele. The westside building was even expanded to accommodate the senior citizen lunches and community meetings.

With the changes, both

buildings now provide "a place for people to socially interact and to obtain social services," through the assistance of North Central Community Action and other organizations. The elderly residents also use the westside facility to interact with young people, "and I think the seniors really like that," Pishkur said. The advantages for the children are obvious. "It gives them something to look forward to every day," he said, "and hopefully they learn something, too."

With budgets tightening even more this year, Pishkur said programs were "a little scaled back," and resulted in a little more baseball-playing and a few less trips that cost money. The children were determined not to let a few

special things slip past them. They did some of their own fund-raising to be sure the

Indianapolis trip was offered again this year. "The staff just sat down and explained what was going on, and they understood," Pishkur said.



A young girl at the eastside center shows off her journal she's been working on.

He hopes the funding sources will come to the forefront again in the near future. In addition to desires for a senior nutrition site at the eastside facility, Pishkur would like to restart a mentoring and tutoring

program at both facilities. The search for funding sources continues, he said.

"It's cliché, but if one of these kids gets something out of it, it's all worth it," he said. ■