Celebrating 20 years with the Connecting Link. Frank Hill, Sister Dorothy Rasche, Bill Thomas and Tara Lane hold up their new building banner.

Brief history...

The Connecting Link, a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Providence, has assisted more than 3,500 individuals in need of food, money, furniture, clothing or basic services since its beginning in 1997. In addition, the local churches and Helping Hands have supplied Connecting Link with monetary donations to help with utility bills. The following agencies, organizations and groups have worked together with Connecting Link to advocate for a healthy and friendly living environment for the community:

- Hamilton Center branch
- Helping Hands
- TH Humane Society
- Local churches
- Providence Food Pantry
- Providence Housing Corporation
- Saint Ann Clinic
- Salvation Army
- Vigo County: Council, Public Library, commissioners, redevelopment and School Corporation
- WTH Town Council
- West Vigo Community Center
- Westside focus group

Sisters of Providence, friends and volunteers come together and voice their experience from the past 20 years with the Connecting Link.

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In 2017, the Connecting Link, a sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Providence, is celebrating 20 years of service to the West Terre Haute (WTH) community. Through Sister Dorothy Rasche, director, the organization has provided more than 3,500 individuals since 1997 with information, referrals and advocacy, assisting those in need of food, gas, money, furniture, clothing and other basic services.

The Connecting Link also partners with local churches, Helping Hands and other organizations to advocate for a healthy and friendly living environment for the community. To help commemorate this milestone, friends of The Connecting Link were asked to share their favorite memories.

Lauri Chandler, manager of the West Branch of the Vigo County Public Library, first met Sister Dorothy when she began attending library board meetings to discuss the future of the West Branch. “The building was in such bad shape and was not able to be brought up to where it should be,” said Lauri. “Sister Dorothy was a huge advocate for relocating the library to its new building, which had previously been a day care. The result is a larger space which allows for an adult reading area, computer area and meeting rooms that can accommodate programs for all ages including game nights, family movies, story times, after-school programs, computer classes and art projects. In the previous location, people would just come in, get what they needed and leave. It was so small and there was no elevator. Any programs held in rooms upstairs were inaccessible to many.” Sister Dorothy also introduced Lauri to several area organizations, including Providence Food Pantry, another WTH ministry of the Sisters of Providence.

Reverend Steve Moore worked with Sister Dorothy in WTH for 15 years when he was with the United Church of Christ. “She’s one of the most caring people that I’ve ever known. I knew she was a person who was serving the Lord by serving people in need,” said Pastor Steve. “She was my minister. I would go sit down in her office and we’d talk.” She was the leader...

“... provided more than 3,500 individuals since 1997 with information ...

West Vigo Community Center Board would like to thank The Connecting Link on their 20th Anniversary and for all the help they provide in the community.
In 2010, dozens of volunteers worked to clean up West Terre Haute. The clean up day was organized by members of the community service group Connecting Link.

Marines from 3rd Battalion/24th Marines KILO Company.

Sister Dorothy Rasche, SP

Earl Rodgers

Thomas Roberts weeds on West National.

Sister Joyce Brophy, SP

Pastor Barb Taylor with the Christ United Methodist Church became good friends with Sister Dorothy. She remembered planning for a Good Friday combined service. They were at a loss for what to do and Sister Dorothy handed Pastor Barb the Catholic Missalette. “I thought at first, ‘what are we going to do with a Catholic Missalette?’ It worked out great with the different readings. The Westleyan pastor read Pilot’s part, a youth minister with the Assembly of God was Jesus,” said Pastor Barb. She added, “Everybody knows her and she’s very influential. She knows who should have the help and the churches back her up. If there was a family in need, Sister Dorothy would put out an email to all the churches asking for help.”

Gary Couch owns a lot of rental property in WTH and he knows Sister Dorothy and the Connecting Link quite well. “If someone’s lost their home or is looking for a place, she lets me know. She also helps get things donated. If we get a renter with no furniture, we call her for help,” said Gary. “She is a very good person and she really cares about the town.”

Sister Joyce Brophy, SP, volunteered part-time with Sister Dorothy at The Connecting Link. “People come in with all types of requests. One person needed gas money to get to a medical appointment in Terre Haute and Sister Dorothy helped them,” said Sister Joyce. She remembers when an elderly couple came in to the office. They had just been released from the hospital after their trailer gas line had asphyxiated them. The owner was told he had to fix it before they returned. Sister Dorothy put the couple up in a hotel overnight and got in touch with the gas company and owner to get the problem fixed so they could return to their home. “Sister Dorothy has helped people repair their houses and ensured they had indoor facilities. Once we helped someone fix up their home, we noticed that others were encouraged on either side to fix up their homes,” added Sister Joyce. She noted that Sister Dorothy has been able to donate older hospital beds, and other medical devices like walkers, that were no longer used by the Congregation, to WTH residents. Sister Joyce was also encouraged by the various churches who gathered to pray for the community. “I felt so inspired by the prayer. It was spontaneous and each person from different denominations shared.”

Randi Everett has volunteered with Sister Dorothy and has known her since 1990 when their paths crossed at the U.S. Penitentiary in Terre Haute. She remembers the home repair program that helped transform numerous homes in WTH. “She is energetic, trustworthy, organized, compassionate and accepting of others. She has a bigger vision for the people of WTH. She wants them to achieve their dreams and not feel inferior because they live on the other side of the bridge.”

Jim Plew served on the WTH board and his wife, Linda, typed up the minutes. Sister Dorothy knew that Linda was an animal advocate and when Linda began helping residents get services for their pets, Sister Dorothy gave her a little money to help get pet clinics going. Linda is involved in the Spay/Neuter...
ConnectingLink

League and encourages residents of WTH to get their pets spayed and neutered. The city and county help provide money, too, for people who are low income so their pets receive free services like spay/neuter, shots, flea medication and worming medication. “Sister Dorothy has supported me both emotionally, and financially in my animal advocacy,” said Linda.

Howard Junker first met Sister Dorothy when they worked together in WTH, rehabilitating houses. He also worked with Sister Dorothy in starting Providence Housing Corp., by purchasing the land for low income apartments for seniors and homes for families. “Sister Dorothy is involved in everything. She rents her office from me and also uses extra storage for furniture for families in need,” said Howard. “She’s a beacon in WTH, increasing the intensity of the sisters and the college presence.” The town board decided to beautify some of the open areas on National Avenue with flowers and decorations for Christmas, Easter, Memorial Day and Sister Dorothy is involved. “She’s also gotten ISU students to come to WTH to clean sidewalks and streets and has involved high school and middle school children in planting flowers. Some people talk about doing things but Sister Dorothy is actually available to the community,” added Howard.

Mel Smith has worked with Sister Dorothy at IGA for many years. “Sister Dorothy brings people in to buy groceries. She uses cash or gift cards from local churches to help them purchase food items. She’s a very nice lady,” said Mel. She also said that Sister Dorothy points people to different resources. “I love Sister Dorothy!” Mel exclaimed. Mel mentioned that she was in need of a single bed and Sister Dorothy found one available at the SP motherhouse. IGA encourages shoppers to reuse their shopping bags and donates five cents to the Providence Food Pantry, another ministry of the SPs, when people participate. “I remember a lady put items in her cart and got up to the cashier. She said that Sister Dorothy was going to meet her to help pay for her items and Sister Dorothy showed up right on time.”

“... it would take 10 people or more to replace Sister Dorothy.”

Laura Large is manager of the Marathon Gas Station. Laura remembers in 2008 when WTH and Toad Hop flooded and said that Sister Dorothy helped people get things that they needed during that difficult time. “I work at the gas station next to Sister Dorothy’s office and she’s pretty well known. If someone needs gas, Sister Dorothy will come over with the person and let them pump gas, using one of her gas cards,” said Laura. Laura has worked in WTH her entire life and she knows many of the residents. “People will ask me if they need something and if they aren’t too lazy to work or aren’t scammers, I’ll refer them to Sister Dorothy.” Laura said it would take 10 people or more to replace Sister Dorothy. “I love her to death. She’s an angel on all of our shoulders,” she added. “The Connecting Link helps people start over again who have nothing. Sister Dorothy is there for everybody. If she doesn’t have what you need, she’ll send you down to Helping Hands for clothes or food at the Food Pantry. She knows where to send people to get help,” added Laura.

Howard is the owner of Junker Realty, located on the corner of 9th and National. He took a chance on Sisters Rita and Dorothy being good renters. They have been there for 17 years.

“We must be good renters because Howard Junker has let us use the empty office space next to the Connecting Link for NO extra cost! When there is a fire or other need for furniture, if it is there, it is free for the taking…” said Sister Dorothy.
is done through the Connecting Link,” said Bill. “The Connecting Link provides so many different avenues to help fulfill needs in a very poor community, whether it be for groceries or to pay a gas bill.” Bill says he’s most grateful to Sister Dorothy for her generous work with the WV Community Center and the West Branch of the library. “None of that would be here today without Sister Dorothy and the Connecting Link.” Bill said the community center was having financial troubles and on the brink of closing its doors. Sister Dorothy offered to loan them money interest-free, which they gratefully paid back. “The Connecting Link is always there. Sister Dorothy puts you in a direction for immediate help. We are best buddies,” added Bill.

Megan Miller is the director of Providence Housing Corporation (PHC), a ministry that Sister Dorothy helped launch for low-income seniors and single-family housing. Megan said, “I’ve worked with her for 12 years. The Connecting Link office used to be located in PHC’s community center called All Place.” Sister Dorothy knew Megan when Megan was doing home buyer education at the Terre Haute Housing Authority. “I did training for folks involved in Phase 2 of PHC for single-family housing and my husband mowed the grass.” Megan said that she and Sister Dorothy do a lot of referrals for each other now. “If she has folks who contact her that need low income senior housing, I try and help. I’ve had some people interested in utilizing the USDA forgivable loan program and Sister Dorothy has assisted them. I’m also in contact with people that need services, such as food, gas or even furniture. And, some of our people have furniture to donate so I coordinate that with Sister Dorothy,” added Megan. “I’m a WTH girl at heart, although I don’t live here anymore,” said Megan. “If you have a need, Sister Dorothy is the one to send to ask for something. She doesn’t take ‘no’ for an answer.”

Glena Salyer met Sister Dorothy at the U.S. Federal Penitentiary. “She’s a sweet lady and very nice to talk to,” said Glena. “Most recently, I know Sister Dorothy is working with some people to help get a pharmacy open in West Terre Haute.” When Glena first moved to WTH, she lived in two trailers and one of them caught on fire. Sister Dorothy helped them through the situation. “To this day, I’ll stop in and say ‘hi’ to Sister Dorothy if she’s in her office,” added Glena.

“She’s a sweet lady and very nice to talk to …”

Frank Hill has known Sister Dorothy for almost 20 years. He first met her when he worked at the energy company in Terre Haute. “She called me and wanted help in getting some lights changed out in WTH. I told her it wasn’t my department but I’d find someone to help her.” Frank always remembers her being involved in the community. “When I was president of the WV Community Center, she helped me tremendously by allowing us to borrow money to help save the center,” said Frank. “She’s been a wonderful spiritual presence to me and the community as well,” added Frank. Frank has served on the Connecting Link board for 10 years. “About a month ago, Sister Dorothy helped arrange on-demand bus service in WTH. If a person needs the city bus, they call and get picked up at IGA. Many people just don’t have transportation in WTH,” said Frank. “She’s a leader among leaders.” He added that Sister Dorothy is really a spiritual leader and she starts and ends meetings with prayer. “She’s had a lot of influence on me personally. I look to her as my spiritual leader. She got me back into attending the Catholic church.”

Penny Frederick and Stacy Pierce knew of Sister Dorothy and her work with the federal prison but got reacquainted with her after they retired, through volunteerism. Sister Dorothy would stop by Providence Food Pantry to greet volunteers and clients. She asked to use their van (affectionately called, “the food wagon”), to help her transport donated furniture and household goods to her storage space. “One day, she asked if we could pack up and deliver a van load of furniture from her storage space. She directed us to a small apartment where we found a very grateful, older gentleman waiting for us in an empty apartment. As we unloaded the van, Sister Dorothy talked with him to further ascertain his needs, resources, skills and abilities, and build rapport. She told him about Providence Food Pantry. The man seemed somewhat timid and perhaps overwhelmed by the offer of assistance,” said Penny. Penny said the man, still hesitant, appeared at the food pantry the following Thursday and Stacy greeted him, giving him several boxes and a cart, after she got him signed-in at the desk. The man has since become a regular food pantry client. “Over time, we have observed the man smile a bit more, walk a bit taller, and exude a bit more confidence as each month passes. Sister Dorothy gave this man a new lease on life,” added Penny. Happy 20th Anniversary, the Connecting Link!

Bill Thomas, who owns Double Bee Fence Company, has always lived in WTH and has served on the Connecting Link board for many years. He has also previously served on the Providence Housing Corp. board and as president of the WTH Town Council. “Sister Dorothy is a great friend to me and to the WTH community. So much outreach

“Sister Dorothy gave this man a new lease on life …”

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1997
- Apply to start new ministry in West Terre Haute
- Grant of $216,380 from Sisters of Providence New Growth Fund
- Became a program of Sisters of Providence Self-Sufficiency Ministries
- Minnie Gowan introduced us to the West Terre Haute community
- Howard Junker leased Connecting Link a room at 830 W. National Ave.
- Open House July 4, 1997
- Appointed to 1st Steps Council of Vigo County
- Joined Ministers Association
- Maryland Community Church provided seed money for revolving loan fund

1998
- Liz Gibson conducted Community Needs Survey
- First of two USDA Grant for housing rehab
- Sharon Walden was a part-time volunteer
- First Annual Community Thanksgiving Service at First Assembly of God
- Treasurer of Ministers Association
- First Habitat for Humanity inquiry
- Enrollment Center for Hoosier Healthwise (HIP2.0)

1999
- Started BITH DAY at First Assembly of God
- Dresser Community Garden
- Appointed to Step Ahead Board
- Sister Joyce Brophy was a part-time volunteer
- Providence Housing Corporation (PHC) started with $50,000
- honoring the Canonization of Saint Mother Theodore Guerin
- Created Affordable Housing Rehabilitation Program
- $225,000 Grant from Eli Lilly Foundation for housing rehab
- Melissa Rohrbach was hired as Administrator of PHC
- ISU students did minor house repairs
- July 12, 1999 – First PHC Board members: Sisters Barbara Ann Zeller, Marie Alexis Seiger, Jane Bodine, Ann Margaret O'Hara, Jenny Howard, as well as Randy Herrington and Jerry Keel

2000
- First Housing Rehabilitation Grant received (HOME) and owner occupied application began
- Consultants: SK Wilson & Associates hired
- Explored Senior Housing options
- Dave Ellis of Indiana State University led risk assessments
- PHC staff became Certified Lead Based Paint instructors
- Received $50,000 in match money from Vigo County Council for housing

2001
- Purchased 20 acres on Paris Avenue
- Tara Lane organized a First Time Homeowner Workshop
- Lions Club assisted with wheelchair ramps
- Donated furniture outlet started as an extension of Helping Hands

2002
- Groundbreaking ceremony for Senior Apartments at Providence Place
- PHC office moved to 820 National Ave.
- Phase I Senior Apartments were occupied by Christmas
- First application for new single family homes at Providence Place
- Marines extended Toys for Tots to West Terre Haute
- Community Resource Alliance started
- Appointed to Maryvale Board
- Salvation Army: Back-to-school backpack program
- United Way Compass II Needs and Assets Committee

2003
- Dedication of Providence Place and All Place
- Phase II Senior apartments, Phase I Single Family homes and All Place
- PHC and Connecting Link offices moved to All Place
- Sister Rita Black began Indigent Medication Program at St. Ann Clinic
- CDGDB grant for Owner Occupied Housing Rehabilitation
- United Way Compass II report on needs assets of Vigo County
- Chair United Way Compass II on Minorities
- $30,000 gift to Connecting Link from a West Terre Haute couple

2004
- 100 year flood and PHC was safe
- NIP and HOP grants for housing rehabilitation
- Grant for Meditation Garden at PHC
- Efforts failed to stop Club Koyote from locating in WTH

2005
- Phase III Senior Apartments and Phase II Single Family Houses
- United Way Compass II Workshops: Minority Inclusion in Politics, Education and Employment
- Hate crimes on Ferguson Hill
- White racist problems in Wabash Valley

2006
- Megan Miller replaces Melissa Rohrbach as PHC Director
- Rehabilitation Program closes with 37, total Owner Occupied homes remodeled
- No Place for Hate project facilitated 2 public meetings
- Started ministry as Spiritual Guide at United States Penitentiary

2007
- Coordinated West Vigo No Place For Hate Action outcomes
- Connecting Link moves back to 830 West National Avenue office space
- Connecting Link Board established with Nancy Dowell, Frank Hill, Vicki Layton, Kathy Miller, Megan Miller, Jim and Linda Plew and Bill Thomas

2008
- Flood in Toad Hop: Flood Relief Fund established plus Salvation Army/FEMA immediate help giver
- Community Focus Group started
- Terre Haute Community Garden began
- Large furniture donations accepted at 830 National Avenue
- No Place For Hate Rally

2009
- Donation from National Weatherization Training Conference

2010
- Annual cleanup of National Avenue began with help of Marines, West Vigo Ambassadors and football team
- Removed burnt house by railroad crossing on Hwy 150
- Loaned $5,000 to West Vigo Community Center to pay utility bills

2011
- Researched city wide trash pickup
- Started Revitalization of downtown West Terre Haute Group

2012
- $500 donation from West Vigo Football team for Spay and Neuter Program
- Habitat House built on South 6th Street
- City wide trash pickup began

2013
- Loaned West Vigo Community Center $30,000 to pay off IRS and became eligible for grants

2014
- Sale of West Terre Haute Day Care building
- Kept Vigo County Public Library Branch open
- Relocated Library to new and bigger space

2015
- West Vigo Community Center repaid $30,000 loan
- Hamilton Center opened Branch Office in West Terre Haute

2016
- West Vigo Elementary School remodeled
- Julie Mansard was part-time volunteer at Connecting Link
- Vigo County School Corp annual food drive for Providence Pantry

2017
- 20th Anniversary of Connecting Link Celebrated