



## The Institute of Women Today

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### Transitions

In 1989 when the Archdiocese of Chicago gave the St. Carthage church, rectory and school to IWT, one of the church secretaries asked, "What will happen to all the seniors who gathered here?" St. Carthage had been filling a big need for Englewood seniors who wanted a safe place to get together and participate in programs and activities. With the parish no longer in existence, there were no community resources available to help this group, many of whom were retired teachers and city workers, who had lived their entire lives in the neighborhood.

The secretary, Mrs. Phyllis White, worked with Sister Margaret Traxler, SSND to establish the Vincennes Senior Center in the former church property and for two decades, hundreds of seniors have been welcomed with the familiar face and warm smile of its Director, Phyllis White.



Under her leadership, the seniors participated in music and art programs, exercise classes, listened to informational speakers, maintained a beautiful garden and visited points of interest in Chicago and throughout the Midwest. Whatever the need, whether it was finding assistance for utility bills or a medical problem, Phyllis always found ways to help the seniors. Even in her later days when oxygen tanks accompanied her everywhere, her capacity for fun and laughter remained.

On July 21, 2009 Phyllis passed from this Earth, leaving behind two adult children, nine grandchildren and great grandchildren, as well as hundreds of seniors who were proud to call Mrs. White their "friend."

One of those friends, Mrs. Sophia Foster, has taken over Phyllis's position as Director. Sophia and Phyllis were both parishioners and friends at St. Carthage for more than 50 years. Sophia, pictured above, worked for Catholic Charities for many years as a home health aide, providing short term services primarily for seniors who had undergone surgery and were recovering in their homes. Sophia said she always loved helping people, but she had a special appreciation for seniors. After her retirement, Sophia began attending programs at the Vincennes Senior Center, and served as a volunteer helper to Phyllis for many years. Although Sophia humbly states that she could never replace her friend Phyllis, Sophia is continuing on with the same programs, and adding even more activities for her beloved seniors. We welcome Sophia to her new position.

### Harmony, Hope & Healing



This year marks the ninth anniversary of IWT and Harmony, Hope & Healing (HHH) making beautiful music together! We have come a long way from a humble beginning of the Sisters of Mercy supporting the work of Marge Nykaza in 2001. Since that year HHH has grown to become a viable non-profit music program offering dignity and spiritual healing to the homeless and underserved in the Chicago area. During these past nine years HHH has expanded its faithful service to IWT by hiring HHH staff members Marcia Berry and Amanda Longe to work with Marge to attend to the musical needs of our women, children and seniors. As you can see by the photo, there is a lot to celebrate when we make beautiful music together. Come by, sing a song, and dance with us on Thursday afternoons. You too can enjoy the healing power of music!

## With Gratitude to the Pierce Family

Denis and Martha Pierce first began supporting IWT almost two decades ago when their friends and IWT board members, Betty Phillips and Rev. Betsy Bueschel encouraged them to attend one of our holiday concerts. Betty, Betsy and the Pierces were all members of the First Congregational Church of Wilmette, and all were very interested in supporting social service agencies and projects. As Denis and Martha came to events and provided financial support to IWT, they began to realize that our organization had many of the same challenges as other small organizations they supported.

Denis, a successful attorney, and Martha, a graduate of the Chicago Theological Seminary and former Executive Director of The Chicago Metropolitan Sanctuary Alliance, wanted to create a means of supporting small agencies in a way that would make significant impact in their long term operations. Their enlightened vision gave birth to the Pierce Family Charitable Foundation whose mission it is to "strengthen charitable organizations' administrative and financial capacity through financial grants, in-kind services and technical assistance to help improve lives for the homeless and immigrant families and support environmentally sound practices in housing and food and energy efficiency." We have been one of the agencies that the Foundation has supported since its inception. In addition to continued general operating support, in 2007 the Pierce Family Charitable Foundation provided a Challenge Grant. IWT contributors successfully donated the needed funds to meet that challenge. The Pierce Family Charitable Foundation also has engaged the services of several specialists that continue to assist IWT in many areas including fundraising, public relations, volunteer coordination, computer assistance and much more. We thank the Pierce Family Charitable Foundation for its generosity and continued support. (The Pierce family pictured above.)



For more information on the Pierce Family Charitable Foundation please visit their website at [www.PierceFamilyFoundation.org](http://www.PierceFamilyFoundation.org) and the January 25, 2010 issue of *Crain's Chicago Business* which features a front page article on the Pierce family and their charitable work.



## February Luncheon—Thank you to all...

IWT would like to send a special Thank You to all who helped make our February luncheon a success. The committee and other volunteers spent months gathering wonderful raffle items and planning for a very special day. More than 220 people attended the luncheon which raised \$11,605.00 for IWT! Pictured here is Chrishonda Hunter who gave a moving tribute to the mission of Maria Shelter.

## Online Giving—An Additional Option

You can help improve the lives of women and children in need by making a **donation** to IWT. An option is to make that donation online. You will be taken to PayPal's secure Web site where you can make a donation using any major credit card. Learn more at the website for the Institute of Women Today.

[www.instituteofwomentoday.org](http://www.instituteofwomentoday.org)

Your gift will help us provide the help women and children need to improve their lives, find jobs, and secure housing.

## Email Addresses Sought

With the ever increasing costs associated with printing and mailing our newsletters, we are asking supporters to *please* consider providing us with your e-mail address. We hope to eventually send newsletters by e-mail and save enough money to pay for much needed projects. It is good for the environment and good for us...Please help. Email us at [iwt7315@aol.com](mailto:iwt7315@aol.com).



“Don’t let your depression or your situation define you.”



Velisia and her young son came to Maria Shelter in search of a new start and a brighter future. She remembers feeling alone and frightened of what would happen to her and her child. Velisia had been living with her mother and step father along with her sister and her sister’s children. She recalled that her mother had been quite ill for several years. Finally she and her son were asked to leave by her mother. Although the small apartment was quite crowded still, it was the only place she had to live. Needless to say she was stunned and on some level felt betrayed by her mother’s seeming abandonment of her and her child.

Velisia came to Maria Shelter feeling very depressed and unsure about her future. Slowly she began to open up and trust the staff enough to talk about her feelings and the life she would like to make for herself and her child. With the help and support of shelter staff Velisia decided that she

would like to work in the medical field. Case management services identified a program that would provide training in the medical arena. Connecting Velisia with child care services allowed her the peace of mind she needed knowing that her son would be well cared for while she attended school. Employment services also helped to connect her with a part time job. Velisia graduated from her program with a 4.0 average; however, shortly after that she was laid off from her job. She was devastated but refused to give up. She worked with staff to create a new resume. Staff encouraged her to drop her resume off at some of the businesses in the area which she did. She dropped one off at a clinic and that same afternoon she got a call from the office manager. Velisia got the job. The doctor who owned the clinic said he was very impressed by her resume.

Shortly after that things got even better for her. Families Building Communities called her for an apartment. Both she and her son were overjoyed to be moving into their own place. Velisia remarked that no one could have made her believe that she would be where she is today: living on her own, making a good living and actually finding the joy of living.

Most recently Velisia was promoted to team leader within the urgent care clinic where she works. She has some advice, “Don’t let your depression or your situation define you.” There are people willing to help if you let them.

## Shelter and Senior Needs

You can support Maria Shelter and the Vincennes Senior Center by helping secure any of the following:



1. Blankets, towels, sheets and pillows
2. Gift certificates to Target
3. Toiletries
4. Diapers and formula
5. Socks and underwear
6. Art supplies
7. Rubbermaid storage containers
8. Brooms, mops and cleaning supplies
9. Rakes and tools for yard cleanup
10. Lawn mower—used or new.....
11. Fax machine
12. Copier
13. Digital Camera

If you can provide any of the above, please contact Gwen Fowler at Maria Shelter—773-994-5350

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