

## A detective story

**Stan Celmer's quest to discover his origins brought him to Catholic Charities.**

Even if we're not always sure where we're going, most of us know whence we came. We know our parents and our family heritage. We know where we got the color of our eyes, our talents, our quirks, our proclivities. And although we may deny it, the proof is often in the way people say we resemble our mom or dad or some other family member.

Imagine, however, that your origins are a mystery that's deepened over the course of seven decades. You don't know who your birthparents were, or if you have brothers or sisters, or aunts or uncles. Stan Celmer knows that feeling, and it's a psychological itch he's been trying to scratch for some time.

Stan has known since childhood that he was adopted by his parents, Henry and Rachel Celmer, when he was about 6 months old. During Stan's formative years, the Celmers lived in Elkhart, Fort Wayne, and then southern Michigan, where Stan graduated from White Pigeon High School.

"I grew up in a loving Catholic family," Stan says. "I couldn't have asked for better parents; they provided me with everything I needed."

After earning a bachelor's degree at the University of Seattle, Stan served in the Army. He finally settled in California and got married. He and his wife, Paula, have five children. Stan's professional career included stints in the aerospace industry and sales. He also owned his own business for a while.



Stan Celmer is searching for his roots.



Catholic  
Charities

Fort Wayne-South Bend Diocese

## The stuff that matters

I was up in the attic the other day, trying once again to bring a bit of order to our family “stuff,” when I landed upon a time capsule in the form of a reel-to-reel tape recorder. For those of you younger than I, reel-to-reels predate iPhones, iPods, DVRs, VCRs, cassette recorders—even 8 tracks. But the important thing is that they did *record*.

The minute I laid eyes upon that reel-to-reel, I was transported back to when I was 10 years old, and I recalled the excitement I felt when I spotted it at a church rummage sale. I remembered how I had immediately thought of all the investigating I could do with it—just like Nancy Drew and Trixie Beldon—and plopped down my dime to make it mine.

I also remembered the Christmas dinner in 1964 that I had captured on its reels. It had been what I thought was a typical Christmas dinner—one with my parents, maternal grandma and grandpa, aunt and uncle and their two sons, my sister and foster sister, and me—all together as it seemed we would always be.

But then I wondered: Would the recorder still work? It did. I sat down in that hot attic and *heard* the family of my youth. Some of them, like my grandma, grandpa, and dad, have been gone for decades. But here they were—their voices, anyway—saved intact. I couldn’t help thinking of all that would have been lost had I not set that microphone on my grandma’s buffet all those years ago, and had I not saved that recorder.

At a staff meeting not long after working with Army Casualty and Mortuary Affairs during its research on Paul (see page 5), I shared the contents of his file. We looked at the folder full of pictures, grade cards, notes about his interests and ambitions, his handwritten letters from the front to Sister Mary and others nuns, their letters in return, a prayer card that he had carried with him, and last, the telegram announcing, with regrets, that he’d been killed in action. There were tears, and there was silence as each of us realized that the contents of that file, and the memories of



Debbie (left) at Easter with her grandma, sister Brenda, and first cousins Willie and Jack.

people whose lives he touched, are all that remains of Paul.

All of what is left of the records from the St. Vincent Villa orphanage, as well as the adoption and foster records from our agency, Woodhaven Maternity Home, and Family and Children’s Services, are in our hands. And so they will remain because memories *do* matter.

That reel-to-reel recorder may have been the precursor to my current interest in genealogy. It may be the reason I now have two four-drawer file cabinets filled with school and church records, deeds, and photos of my ancestors going back 16 generations. Though I was never much of a physics student, I know that Albert Einstein concluded that the past, present, and future all exist simultaneously. Hearing my dad’s voice again the other day made it clear how true that is—especially if we bother to keep the stuff that matters.

Debbie Schmidt, M.Ed.

Did you know?

The Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command has identified the remains of over 1,400 Americans who were MIA/KIA.

## Upcoming events

**August:** RSVP (Auburn) will begin its Pack A Backpack program distribution to needy students. If you’d like to donate school items, such as paper, pens, pencils, crayons, markers, folders, binders, rulers, glue, etc., please drop them off at RSVP, 107 West 5th Street.

**Friday and Saturday, October 17-18:** RSVP Quilt Show at Auburn United Methodist Church, 1203 East 7th Street. The show will feature two national traveling quilt displays never before seen in Indiana, quilt classes, vendors, additional quilts on display, and a bed turning (featuring stories of special quilts). Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday from 9 to 4. Admission is \$5; there’s an additional charge for classes. For additional information, send a SASE to RSVP, 107 West 5th Street, Auburn, Indiana 46706.

**Thursday, November 13:** RSVP (Auburn) will host its Senior Expo at the Kendallville Event Center just off U.S. 6 from 8 a.m. until noon. Businesses and health-care organizations that provide services to seniors will be represented. Admission is free, and there will be free flu shots for those over 65.

**Friday, November 14:** RSVP (Auburn) will raffle off a quilt. Tickets, \$1 each or six for \$5, may be purchased at RSVP, 107 West 5th Street. (If you’d like a picture of the quilt, we’ll mail you one.)

**November:** RSVP (Auburn) will start its Share the Warmth Program, collecting new or gently used coats, hats, gloves, mittens, and scarves for needy families in the chapter’s four-county service area. Items may be dropped off at RSVP, 107 West 5th Street.

RSVP (Auburn) distributed more than 4,000 coats, hats, scarves, gloves, and mittens during Share the Warmth last year. Many of the items were made by RSVP members.

RSVP (Auburn) distributed more than 1,500 new backpacks filled with school supplies to the children of lower-income families during Pack-A-Backpack last year.

Did you know?

## Wish list

Catholic Charities has an ongoing need for new and gently used items. If you have something to contribute, please contact Barb Burlingham in South Bend at (574) 234-3111, ext. 31, or Judy Schmidt in Fort Wayne at (260) 422-5625, ext. 229.

### RSVP (Auburn)

- School supplies and backpacks for the Pack-A-Backpack program
- Canned goods
- Paper goods
- Cleaning supplies for the food pantry
- Yarn and fabric
- Fiberfill

### Refugee Resettlement

- Pillows
- Linens (sheets and pillowcases in all sizes, comforters, blankets, quilts, mattress pads)
- Bath towels, washcloths, hand towels
- Dishcloths and towels
- Paper products (toilet paper, tissues, towels)
- Trash bags
- Household cleaning products
- Diapers

- Women’s hygiene products
- Personal care products
- Newborn products (lotion, baby wash, Q-tips, baby bottles, cotton balls, etc.)
- Educational toys and books for ages 2-10
- School supplies (book bags, pens, paper, erasers, and rulers) for all school-age children.

### ECHO

- Infant diapers, clothing, and car safety seats
- Pack ‘n Plays

But although Stan's life has been full and rewarding, he'd still like answers to some nagging questions: What are his origins? Who are his people? He's obviously of European descent, but which nationality? German? Irish? French?

Stan's adoptive parents weren't able to provide him with answers to those questions; they simply didn't know. All they could tell him that was his adoption had been arranged by Associated Catholic Charities, which then served the entire northern half of Indiana. Since Catholic Charities must keep records of adoptions it facilitates for 99 years, Stan thought the agency was a good place to start.

About 10 years ago, Stan began his investigation in earnest with a phone call to Catholic Charities Executive Director Debbie Schmidt, who was then director of adoption. As an avocational genealogist, Debbie enjoys digging around in the past, whether it's part of her job, or just for the fun of it. Debbie did some sleuthing and called Stan.

"I didn't expect anything," Stan says. "But then Debbie called and asked me, 'Are you sitting down? Do you know what a foundling is?' Then she told me that I had been left on a doorstep when I was just a newborn."

It was around 10 p.m. on November 10, 1938, when doorbells started sounding throughout an apartment building in a then-upscale section of Gary, Indiana. Frank Collins opened his front door and found what he first thought was a basket of groceries. Taking a closer look, Frank discovered that the basket contained a baby boy, who was about 2 weeks old.

Frank's wife, Alice, was a volunteer at Mercy Hospital, so she took the foundling to the hospital for care. The baby was transferred to St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital in Michigan City about three months later and made available for adoption. The adoption process took longer than usual because there were no parents of record, but the baby eventually had a good home and a name—Stanley Celmer.

And that's where the trail goes cold. "He's found out a lot—and he's found nothing," Debbie says. "It's like chasing something, but you don't know what you're chasing."

"I'm sure there was a young woman out there who felt the loss for many years," Debbie continues. "She did keep and care for Stan for a while. She even bought him nice clothes. And she pushed all the doorbells to make sure someone would find him right away. Obviously, she had very compelling reasons; giving up a child is the hardest thing a mother can do. She was probably frightened or in a very bad situation. It was toward the end of the Great Depression, a very difficult time."

## Safe Haven Law

In March 2000, Indiana enacted its Safe Haven Law, which allows mothers to leave their newborns with personnel at several locations, including hospitals, police and fire stations, and the offices of health-care providers. Outside of those safe havens, babies may also be left with police officers, firefighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians.

Mothers are guaranteed anonymity and freedom from prosecution for abandonment or neglect if the baby is brought to one of these locations or given to a qualified health-care worker or first responder within 45 days of birth, and the baby is unharmed.

"Although this is a new law, the concept has been practiced for decades," says Debbie Schmidt, executive director of Catholic Charities Fort Wayne-South Bend. "This is an important law because it gives mothers who are unable to care for their newborns the opportunity to leave their babies where they'll receive appropriate care. Rather than abandoning their babies where they might be in harm's way, mothers can put them into capable hands without fear of legal reprisal."

Stan thought he might be closing in on something eight years ago, when the *Gary Post-Tribune* ran a page-one article about this search. His story also got some airtime when it came to the attention of an employee at a Chicago-area radio station. That employee was none other than one of Frank and Alice Collins' granddaughters.

"I had a close call," Stan says. "A man called the paper and said his aunt had abandoned her baby at about the same time, so it sounded like a possibility. But DNA testing on the man ruled out that we were related."

Stan, now semiretired and living in Phoenix, will celebrate his 70th birthday on November 11, the anniversary of the day he was taken to Mercy Hospital by Alice Collins. He still hopes to find out who his parents were, although the chances of that diminish with the passing of each year.

"People think I'm upset or frustrated, but I don't lose any sleep over it," Stan says. "It's a detective story. I might find out who my birthparents were, but I probably won't. At this point, unless someone comes forward, there's not much chance. I can't get past the doorstep."

If anyone has any information that might help Stan, please contact Debbie, and she'll pass it along.

## A sacrifice not forgotten

### Catholic Charities has assisted in an Army effort to find a soldier's family.

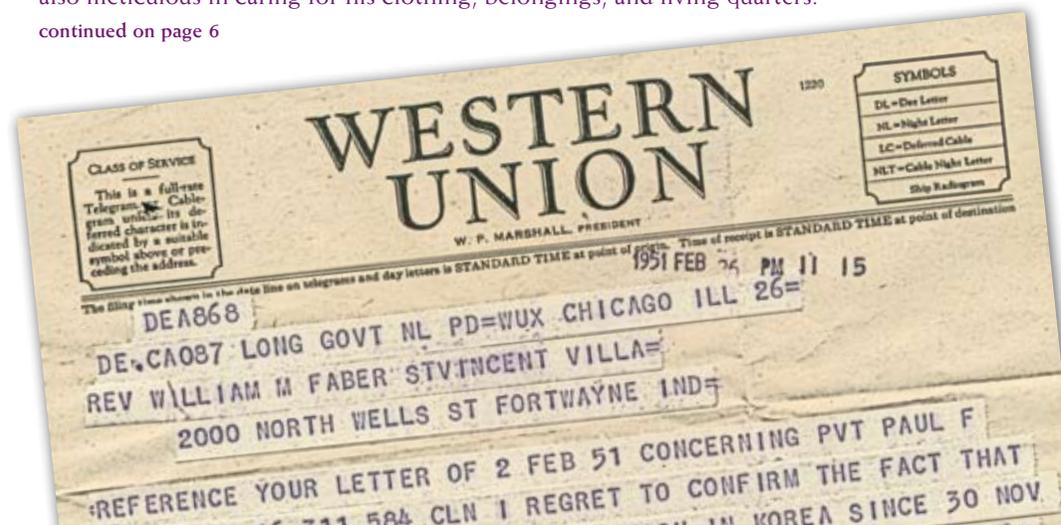
The faded documents in the timeworn folder don't tell the entire story, of course, but they do provide a rough sketch of a bright young man whose greatest aspiration was to serve his country. And those documents, kept by Catholic Charities for nearly 60 years, may finally help bring that young man the recognition and honor he deserved, and, perhaps, bring a measure of pride to family members who didn't know him—or even know of him.

Paul (his surname is being withheld for now) was born in 1932. His family was of Irish-Catholic heritage. In 1947, his parents separated. Because circumstances dictated that his mother was unable to care for him, Paul was placed at St. Vincent Villa, the diocesan orphanage in Fort Wayne.

In their evaluations, St. Vincent staff members wrote that Paul was a clever young man. He was a chess champion, and he enjoyed discussing current events. He was a good athlete, too, and played sports while attending Central Catholic High School. Paul was also meticulous in caring for his clothing, belongings, and living quarters.

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Paul



One somewhat sad entry notes that during his time at St. Vincent, Paul didn't receive any letters or packages, and he took no vacations from the orphanage.

Paul had big plans for the future, but first, he had a duty to fulfill, one that he'd been talking about since he was a boy. Still just a teenager, Paul enlisted in the Army, and he was soon deployed to fight in the escalating conflict in Korea.

In November 1950, the staff at St. Vincent, Paul's only real family by then, received word that Paul was missing in action. In January 1951, a telegram arrived announcing that Paul had been officially listed as missing in action. The actual telegram is among the documents kept by Catholic Charities.

Paul's remains weren't recovered at the time, so there wasn't any military burial with honors befitting his sacrifice.

The Joint POW-MIA Accounting Command, however, continues to search for and identify the remains of soldiers who fell in distant lands such as Korea and Vietnam. Advances in DNA testing have made it possible to identify remains by linking them to relatives. Once remains are identified, the fallen receive posthumous honors, while families experience a sense of closure.

Earlier this year, Debbie Schmidt, executive director of Catholic Charities, was contacted by researchers for the Army Casualty and Mortuary Affairs Operation Center. The Army was searching for information on Paul in its attempt to find any living relatives. It was a good place to look—Catholic Charities keeps from 5,000 to 6,000 adoption records, plus records from St. Vincent Villa and earlier diocesan orphanages in Rensselaer and Lafayette.

"The records we keep are often our only link to the past or the only memory we have of some people," Schmidt says. "It's sad, of course, but outside of any records the military has on Paul, all that remains is a folder of old documents describing his time at St. Vincent Villa.

"While we're required to keep adoption records, we don't have to keep orphanage records," Schmidt adds. "I'm so glad we have these records because if we hadn't preserved them, we wouldn't have been able to assist in possibly locating any of Paul's family members."

The Army thought it might have a lead on a relative. In the government's documents, there was mention of a sister Mary. As it turned out, it was a Sister Mary, a St. Vincent cottage house mother with whom Paul had developed a special rapport. "When orphans didn't have the support of their birth families, the staff at St. Vincent's often became their family," Schmidt says.

Schmidt provided the Army with all the information Catholic Charities has kept, but she's yet to receive word on the status of the search.

"I hope we're notified if anything comes of it," Schmidt says. "The information we have tells us something about who Paul was. We owe it to him to do what we can to tell any remaining relatives, if there are any, that he died serving his country. He hasn't been forgotten."



Paul (the tallest in the back row) and his classmates pose during a graduation ceremony. At the far right is Monsignor William Faber, then chaplain at St. Vincent, who passed away July 7.

## Search and reunion

Through its Search and Reunion Services, Catholic Charities can assist adoptees or birthparents who are seeking information—or perhaps even looking to establish a relationship with estranged family members.

"Regardless of how happy and well-adjusted they are in their lives, there often comes a time when adoptees want to learn more about their roots," says Debbie Schmidt, executive director of Catholic Charities Fort Wayne–South Bend. "And there are parents who want to get to know the children they placed for adoption at a time when that may have been their only option."

The agency receives about 50 search and reunion queries annually. The number of calls often increases around the Christmas holidays, when people's thoughts are likely to focus on family.

"Some adoptees find it difficult to approach an organization for information such as this, but we're here to help in any way we can," Schmidt says. "We can't guarantee a positive outcome from our search, but we'll try our best to connect people who want to be connected."

Associated Catholic Charities, the forerunner of today's organization, was first licensed as a child-placing agency by the Indiana State Department of Public Welfare in 1927. And by law, Catholic Charities must maintain files on all adoptions it facilitates for 99 years. The agency now maintains case records on between 5,000 and 6,000 adoptions.

Adoptees and birthparents may be able to obtain identifying information by giving consent if a placement occurred at Catholic Charities in Fort Wayne or South Bend, Family and Children's Services (the private agency), or Woodhaven Maternity Home (also known as the Fort Wayne Children's Home).

Adoptees seeking information must be at least 21 years old. The place to start for both adoptees and birthparents is the Indiana Adoption History Registry, which provides several forms necessary to begin any search. The registry itself is a free matching service; it doesn't actually search for any person. Obtain additional information on the registry by calling (317) 233-7253, or by going to [www.in.gov/isdh/20371.htm](http://www.in.gov/isdh/20371.htm).

After receiving a written response from the registry, adoptees and birthparents can request a search packet from Catholic Charities. The agency doesn't receive funding for search and reunion, so there is a modest nonrefundable fee for this service.

"Because of the increasing tendency toward open adoption, it's more likely that future adoptees will know their birthparents, and that's a wonderful thing," Schmidt says. "Because of the prevalence of closed adoptions in the past, however, it can be a challenge for adult adoptees to find their roots. That's why we're here to help."

Adoption History  
Registry

(317) 233-7253

[www.in.gov/isdh/  
20371.htm](http://www.in.gov/isdh/20371.htm)

## Coming home

**St. Vincent Villa provided a safe haven, education, and spiritual guidance to thousands of children for nearly a century.**

Although the echoes of their then-youthful voices have long since faded from the cottages, corridors, and classrooms, they still get together each year to renew friendships and remember the place they called home.

On June 29, former students and staff members and their friends and family members gathered at Queen of Angels Church in Fort Wayne for the 67th annual St. Vincent Villa Alumni Reunion.



Mel Claymiller

The reunion is a tradition that began in 1941, when Mel Claymiller was just a lad living at St. Vincent Villa, the diocesan orphanage on Wells Street in Fort Wayne. For the last 30 years or so, Mel has been instrumental in keeping that tradition alive.

"We had a very nice turnout and a good time again this year," Mel says. "We even had some people who were attending the reunion for the first time."

Mel says he was disappointed, however, that Sister Mary Jane Sloderbeck and Monsignor William Faber were unable to attend. Sister Mary Jane, once a member of the St. Vincent staff, helped organize the reunion for many years, while Monsignor Faber was chaplain at the orphanage when Mel lived there.

While it was tragedy that brought Mel to the orphanage, he still has many fond memories of his days there.

Mel was just 5 years old when he and his four brothers were placed at St. Vincent in 1935, after their parents died within a year of each other. Although times were tough during that era, Mel and his brothers were well provided for at St. Vincent.

"It's like everything else: it was what you made of it," Mel says. "Our mother and father were dead, and my brothers and I had no place to go. So, we made the best of it."

"St. Vincent was a great place to be considering the situation," Mel continues. "Our first years there were during the Depression, and we had it better than a lot of people. We were treated very well. Sometimes people from the community would take us downtown for dinner or take us to the movies."

Christmas and other holidays were extra special. "We did excellent at Christmas," Mel recalls. "The people at Wolf & Dessauer would invite us to their big department store downtown and give us bags of fruit and small gifts. And other organizations and individuals made sure we all had presents, too."

Sisters of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ served as staff members throughout St. Vincent's long history. And with about 350 kids living at the orphanage at any given time, they had their hands full. "Each nun might have had 30 to 35 kids to take care of every day—just imagine what you would do!" Mel says. "But, we all go along."

By his own admission, however, Mel was full of mischief. "It was like ordinary home life: if you want to get along with your parents, you will," Mel says. "At St. Vincent, you could be a good kid, or you could be an ornery kid. I was an ornery little guy—I was no saint."

On July 7, just a week after the St. Vincent Villa reunion, Monsignor William Faber, 99, passed away at St. Anne Home in Fort Wayne. He had served the Church for 72 years.

Mel attended Central Catholic High School for a year, but he later graduated from Bryant (Indiana) High School. After a stint in the Marines, Mel began a long career in accounting.

### A place to grow

Mel was grown up and gone by the time Sister Mary Conrad Kirchhoff of the Poor Handmaids came to St. Vincent in 1954. She also has very fond memories of her time at the orphanage.

"Every place I've served with the Poor Handmaids has been a place to grow," Sister Mary Conrad says. "I consider my time at St. Vincent Villa to be 10 of the best years of my religious life. I enjoyed working with the children, and I learned a lot from them. They came from different backgrounds and had different levels of education, but they were all good children. Seeing how courageous they were helped me grow up, too."

One of Sister Mary Conrad's charges at the orphanage has gone on to serve in the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. During Operation Peter Pan in 1961, 18 Cuban refugees, most of them of high school and college age, came to live at St. Vincent Villa. One of those refugees, Felipe Estevez, is now auxiliary bishop of Miami. He recently visited the area to serve as celebrant of the Mass for Sister Mary Conrad's 60th jubilee.

St. Vincent Orphan Asylum was established in 1886 by Bishop Joseph Dwenger, himself an orphan. The original four-story structure was built at a cost of \$50,000.



Mel (in the striped shirt) with a couple of buddies, circa 1945.

In 1933, Bishop John Noll oversaw the construction of several new buildings of Italian Renaissance design on the 25-acre campus, and the name of the facility was official changed to St. Vincent Villa. After the orphanage was closed in 1971, the campus became the home of the Fort Wayne YWCA for more than 30 years.

And now, children's voices are again resounding around the campus, which is the new home of the Imagine MASTER Academy, a public charter school for kids in grades kindergarten through seven.

Mel and others enjoy good company during a recent reunion.



## Catholic Charities honored with Peace and Justice Award

For its extensive and ongoing efforts on behalf of refugees, Catholic Charities Fort Wayne-South Bend has received the Peace and Justice Award from Associated Churches of Fort Wayne. The award was accepted by Bishop John D'Arcy and Debbie Schmidt, executive director of Catholic Charities, on June 11.

Also receiving the Peace and Justice Award were Neil and Diana Sowards, founders of Friends of Burma. Established in 1985,

Friends of Burma partners with social services and individuals to sponsor and resettle refugees in the Fort Wayne area, and to provide a wide range of humanitarian aid in Burma.

The Rev. Vernon Graham is executive pastor of Associated Churches of Fort Wayne, which joins 125 congregations and faith-based organizations in serving the community through a number of ministries.

"The Burmese people continue to suffer under religious, political, and cultural oppression," Graham says. "It was essential that we welcome refugees to Fort Wayne. They're not just Burmese or Buddhists; they're children of God, too."

"The Sowards have been tireless in their efforts to help the Burmese people both here and in Southeast Asia for more than 20 years," Graham says. "For the last several years, Catholic Charities has made it possible for refugees to begin their lives anew and quickly assimilate into our community. This award is a way of expressing the appreciation shared by refugees and the Fort Wayne community as a whole."



Above: Bishop D'Arcy (center) and Debbie Schmidt (left) accept the Peace and Justice Award from Associated Churches of Fort Wayne along with Neil and Diana Sowards (at right).



## Pot-of-Gold winners announced

Joseph Zappia won first prize in Catholic Charities' annual Pot-of-Gold Raffle. The drawing was held at Villa of the Woods on June 5. Proceeds from the raffle will benefit the food pantry in the South Bend office.

Also winning cash prizes, from second place through 12th place, were Sandra Celmer, Mark Beauchot, Mary

Karmolinski, Robert Walsh, Linda Travers, Dolores Glassburn, Patrick Hopman, Rod and Carol Ganey, Victor Kaminski, Jaci Harris, and Melissa Sales-Perez.

A big thanks to everyone who purchased tickets in support of the ongoing work of Catholic Charities.

## Go for the gusto at 'Zest Fest'

Prospective retirees, those already retired, their families, and other interested parties won't want to miss RSVP of St. Joseph County's first "Zest Fest" from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Wednesday, November 5, at the Century Center, 120 South Saint Joseph Street. Although all of the details haven't been finalized, Zest Fest promises to be a fun, informative, multifaceted event.

"We're going to offer many of the activities and services, such as medical screenings, that you'll find at a senior expo, but we're also going to celebrate the zest for life demonstrated by today's older adults," says Jennifer Tindell, RSVP project coordinator.

First up, representatives from a wide variety of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and health-care institutions will be on hand to provide information on their products and services. The St. Joseph Regional Medical Center Medical Mobile Unit and its staff will be there to offer flu shots and various testing, including mammograms. Participants will be able to fill out insurance forms for any services that incur a fee.

In another component, people will learn how to be more secure in their homes by being able to properly identify any workers who might need access to buildings and property. Armed with this information, people can thwart potential thieves and scam artists posing as governmental officials or employees of utility companies or delivery services.

The event will also feature the works of senior artists and entertainment provided by senior musicians. A silent auction to benefit RSVP programs will offer several items, including homemade quilts and a football signed by Raghbir "Rocket" Ismail, the former Notre Dame, Canadian Football League, and NFL star.

Plans are also in the works to bring in a chef who will demonstrate how single seniors can easily prepare tasty and nutritious meals for one.

And, of course, there will be door prizes.

"We're going to touch on some serious topics—and have a lot of fun, too," Tindell says. "I'm sure all of the people who attend Zest Fest will find something to make them glad they came."

Booth spaces are still available for Zest Fest. Organizations wishing to be represented should call Tindell at (574) 287-0500.

### Donations made in memory of:

**Robert Betts**

By Harvey & Janice Boyce  
By Kathy Retzios  
By Evelyn Hedstrom  
By Jerry & Ann Thomas  
By Lewis & Sharon Snyder  
By Carol A. Baker

**Luke Bishop & Mary Forbing**

By Response, Inc.

**Albert Heckber**

By Mr. & Mrs. Buelow  
By Indiana Phoenix, Inc.  
By The Michael Rasbury Family

**Gene Kacent**

By Jack & Fred Silvius

**Mary Alice Kleber**

By Anonymous Donor

**Frank, Bill & Jim Talarico**

By Patricia Meachum

### Donations made in honor of:

**Kim Canpney**

By Julie Ceckowski

**Nyein Chan**

By CANI

**The 50th Wedding Anniversary of Eugene & Helene Henn**

By Gerald Till

**Sue Mantle & Edna Sampson**

By Whitley Council on Aging

## Villa hosts World Refugee Day

Representatives from local government, educational institutions, and service organizations joined refugees, members of the Catholic Charities staff, volunteers, and the general public to celebrate World Refugee Day during an open house at Villa of the Woods in Fort Wayne on June 20.

Speakers included Nyein Chan Oo, director of Catholic Charities' Refugee Resettlement Services; Debbie Schmidt, executive director of Catholic Charities; Amy Johnson from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services; and Diann Bates of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration.

Of course, it wasn't all talk: food, fun, fellowship, and musical entertainment were all part of the festivities. Another highlight was a video showing refugees graduating

from an English-as-a-second-language class at the Anthis Center in Fort Wayne.

"While World Refugee Day is a celebration of different cultures and diversity, it's also a time to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of refugees," says Lisa Young, Catholic Charities assistant director. "Refugees around the world represent a very vulnerable population. They are people in crisis. But while opportunities for them were limited in their homelands or in refugee camps, they're proving that they can excel with just a little helping hand from Catholic Charities and other advocate organizations. It's a wonderful thing to see."

June 20 was designated World Refugee Day in 2000 by a United Nations General Assembly resolution. Observed around the globe, it's a day to salute the indomitable spirit, courage, and resilience of refugees everywhere.



## ECHO celebrates a decade of success

One young woman in particular provided a perfect testament to the value of ECHO (Education Creates Hope and Opportunity) when clients past and present and representatives from social-service agencies and area schools gathered at Lutheran Social Services on June 25 to commemorate the program's 10th anniversary.

Now in her early 20s, the young mother spoke of how ECHO helped her cope with pregnancy when she was just 15 years old. Through the support and encouragement offered by ECHO, she was able to stay in school while meeting the challenges of parenthood. She's now in college, studying to be a social worker.

ECHO is a collaboration joining Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services that

was established in 1998. The program, which is both home-based and school-based, provides guidance and resources to pregnant and parenting teenagers. The goal is for the teens to stay in school as they adapt to being parents. During the past decade, nearly 700 clients have benefited from ECHO.

Lisa Young, now assistant director of Catholic Charities, was the first ECHO case manager when the agency started going to schools in 1999. "ECHO has made all the difference in the lives of so many young mothers," Young says. "If they would have dropped out of school, they would have created a barrier between them and many opportunities to better provide for themselves and their children.

"Of course, we couldn't have done it without the ongoing support of Bishop John D'Arcy and the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend and local foundations, and we thank them for their continued assistance," Young adds.

ECHO is now led by Kela Guy, community service supervisor for Catholic Charities. She previously served as a case manager in the program for six years. "ECHO is an important program because these young women need a lot of support, not just from their parents, but from the community as well," Guy says. "The need for a program such as ECHO hasn't diminished over the last 10 years. And as society changes, so do the needs of ECHO clients. With continued support, we can meet those needs."

Just under one-third of all girls in the United States will get pregnant in their teenage years. Every year around 750,000 teenagers will get pregnant.

**Did you know?**

More than two-thirds of all teenagers who have a baby will not graduate from high school. Ninety-seven percent of pregnant and parenting teens completing the ECHO program were able to complete high school.

## As important as ever

**The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ continue to play a vital role in our community.**

In 1868, eight members of a congregation of religious women founded in Germany traveled to Fort Wayne to assist the growing number of German immigrants resettling in northeast Indiana. One year later, that congregation, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, established St. Joseph Hospital in Fort Wayne.

And now, 140 years later, the Poor Handmaids are still striving to meet the needs of newly arriving refugees and immigrants and members of other vulnerable populations in Allen County.

The St. Joseph Community Health Foundation, a ministry sponsored by the Poor Handmaids, recently awarded Catholic Charities four grants totaling more than \$196,000 to provide medical care and related services to refugees and immigrants. In all, the foundation has provided Catholic Charities with more than \$285,000 to help newcomers in just the last two years.

"The Poor Handmaids have always had a special heart for refugees and

immigrants," says Meg Distler, executive director of the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation. "But their assistance isn't limited to refugees and immigrants; it's also extended to all members of the poor and underprivileged population."

Three of the most recent grants will enable Catholic Charities to assist newly arriving refugees with complex medical issues by providing a nurse case manager and medical translation and interpretation coordinator, and expanded refugee health advocacy in the form of translation and on-site appointment assistance.

"There continues to be a large influx of refugees from Southeast Asia into the Fort Wayne area," Distler says. "Because of the harsh conditions they've had to endure and a lack of adequate medical care, many of these refugees suffer from infectious diseases and chronic health issues. It's in the interest of the refugees, and the community as a whole, that we effectively treat those medical conditions and eradicate disease."

The foundation provided a fourth grant to continue Spanish medical interpretation, translation, and case management services at Catholic Charities for lower-income immigrants and Spanish-speaking community members.

During its first decade, the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation has granted more than \$8,875,000 to 150 agencies in Allen County to improve the overall health and wellness of the community.

The Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, a congregation of Roman Catholic sisters, was founded by Catherine Kasper in Dernbach, Germany, in 1851. With more than 700 members worldwide, the Poor Handmaids serve in a wide variety of capacities: education, health care, childcare, social work, administration—virtually wherever and however they're needed. And, of course, they provide spiritual guidance.

Over the years, the Poor Handmaids have ministered in the United States, Africa, Asia, Mexico, Central and South America, and Europe.

In addition to establishing St. Joseph Hospital, the Poor Handmaids served as

staff at St. Vincent Villa, the diocesan orphanage in Fort Wayne, from its opening in 1886 until its closing in 1971.

The Poor Handmaids Ministry Center in Donaldson, Indiana, is headquarters for the congregation's American Province. Work there encompasses a very wide range of ministries and endeavors, including Ancilla College, the Catherine Casper Life Center, the Lindenwood Retreat Center—and a working beef and grain farm.

Debbie Schmidt, executive director of Catholic Charities Fort Wayne-South Bend, says the Poor Handmaids' efforts on behalf of the poor and underserved today are as significant as the congregation's historic accomplishments almost a century-and-a-half ago.

"The Poor Handmaids were important when Indiana was still part of the American frontier, and they're just as important in our community today," Schmidt says. "Because of their compassion, dedication, and generosity, Catholic Charities will be able to continue in its mission to resettle and nurture the well-being of refugees and immigrants from around the world. We cannot thank them enough."

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## Refugee Resettlement Services

Teach English as a second language and life skills, provide necessary transportation, tutor children, pick up and deliver donated furniture, help with shopping, locate jobs—or just be a friend. The opportunities to help are endless. Contact Paula Spall at (260) 422-5625, ext. 265.

*Catholic Charities celebrates the spirit of Jesus and fosters personal dignity by serving the needs of our neighbors. Catholic Charities serves those in need with special emphasis on the most vulnerable populations—the poor, disabled, migrants, elderly, and children. The agency is committed to improving the quality of life for individuals, the family, and the community.*

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