

Supporters share what TCH means to them

The Community House is more than a facility — it's a reflection of what's best in the community

Making a Difference

By Pamela Lannom
plannom@thehinsdalean.com

The Community House in Hinsdale has been a place to gather and grow for more than 70 years.

Its three-pronged mission of building community “by providing inspiring opportunities for learning, social support and recreation” has fostered a multi-

dimensional agency with a broad user group.

The Hinsdalean asked eight individuals who are associated with The Community House in some way to share their thoughts on what the organization means to them.

For all, The Community House is much more than a building at Eighth and Madison streets. It is a cornerstone of the community. — Jim Slonoff photos

— Making a Difference
is a yearlong partnership between
The Hinsdalean and The Community House,
whose mission is to build community
by providing inspiring
opportunities for learning, social support
and recreation.

Adventist Hinsdale Hospital's community partnership with The Community House was already in place when David Crane became chief executive officer of Adventist Midwest Health almost eight years ago. The hospital provides medical experts for the agency's lecture series, but the partnership goes deeper.



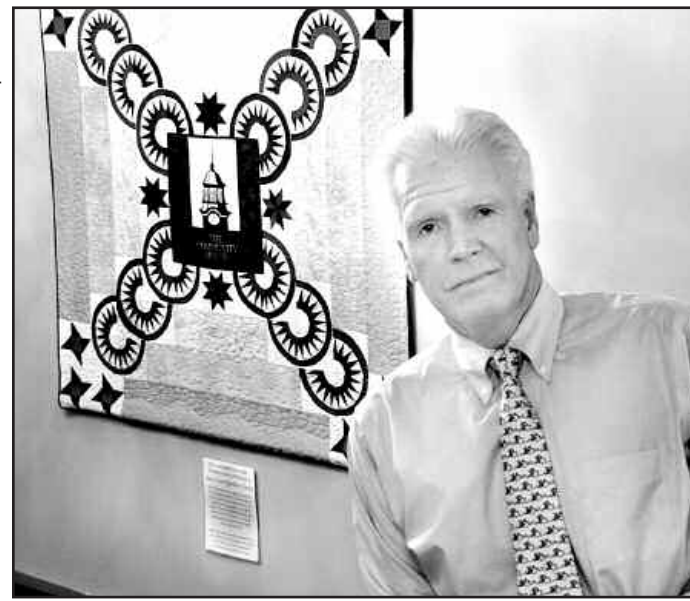
“As a neighbor, we appreciate the fact that The Community House does things for so many different demographic groups in our home town,” he said. “We value that.”

Crane said its absence would leave a huge void.

“There are a number of services that I think are essential to the fabric of our community,” he said, citing programs for seniors, children, those dealing with autism and families served by Willowbrook Corner.

“What we like about it is it crosses the spectrum of Hinsdaleans. It is there for us and it certainly supports those in need.”

Peter Crist describes his relationship with The Community House as self-serving, but the recipients of the scholarship he and his wife, Stephanie, created in memory of their late son would certainly disagree.



“It's a venue to remember my son,” he said. “It's a very selfish venue.”

Crist recalled the soul-searching conversations he and Stephanie had trying to answer one question: “How do we create things that help us remember Jordan and avert a parent's greatest fear, which is he'll be forgotten?”

The Jordan Crist Scholarship Fund is available to children who lack the financial resources to participate in programs at The Community House. It is one of four funds the Crists established to honor their son and pays tribute to Jordan's love of his classmates, many of whom held a flying disc tournament at The Community House to raise money for several years after he died.

“He was a really fine young man and he loved lots of people his age.”

Since the late 1990s, The Community House has been a second home to Lynn Issleib during rehearsals for the Community Revue.



“We practiced endless hours in many of The Community House rooms,” she said. “The staff always found a place for us to rehearse, whether it be the nursery school room or the hallway.”

Show nights translate to wonderful memories of being on stage and in the Essley Room, where cast members gather before the show to focus their minds and warm up their voices.

Issleib has enjoyed the opportunity to help support the organization doing something she loves with people she has grown to care about.

“The shows were not only fulfilling but raised a lot of money for The Community House. This year is an off year and I am missing my Community House home and my Community Revue family.”

An upcoming milestone is a testament to the kind of organization The Community House is, said Joan Walsh Purcell, who has been a trustee since 2011.



“The Community House is a welcoming place with a long history of people getting involved in supporting others in their community,” she said. “In 2016 we will celebrate our 75th anniversary; few nonprofit organizations realize that kind of longevity.”

She credits The Community House's exceptional staff, generous corporate partners, donors and dedicated volunteers for its success. Purcell also values The Community House's focus on supporting others through its counseling department, the Willowbrook Corner learning program and Charlie's Gift Autism Center.

“I think TCH is a wonderful resource for anyone in the western suburbs, and I'm proud to support it.”

Paxton Gammie has been involved with The Community House Junior Board since her freshman year at Hinsdale Central.

Now a senior and co-president of the junior board, Gammie said her understanding of the organization and what it does has deepened.

“When we started the board, I thought The Community House was a place where I could volunteer and help out, but I’ve progressed in my time there. I’ve come to understand it as a place that is the most giving, selfless place there is. I went into it thinking I could give back to my community, but despite how cliché it sounds, The Community House gives back to you.”

A highlight of this year was working on a video that was shown at Holiday Ball, an event that raised \$86,000 for the organization. The project was a lot of work, but it gave Gammie a chance to share on film the many reasons why she loves The Community House.

“I just have grown so passionate about it that I want everyone to know about it.”



For Marcie McGonagle, director of volunteer services, The Community House is more than a place of employment.

“As a resident of Hinsdale and 15-year employee of The Community House, I can honestly say this organization has changed my life. Every day, I am proud to go to work and know that I, along with my colleagues, make a difference in people’s lives. As the director of volunteer services, I feel deep fulfillment when I interview individuals or groups and match them up with a meaningful volunteer opportunity, either within The Community House or with another local organization in need of volunteer support.”

She especially enjoys working with students who participate in volunteer camps or on the junior board along with the variety that comes with working for an organization that offers exercise classes, therapy, youth basketball and painting lessons all in a single day.

“The Community House is a unique treasure and I feel honored to be part of it.”



Mary Heneman has been taking advantage of programs at The Community House for nearly all of the 11 years she and her family have lived in town, starting with Hinsdale Community Preschool when her children were young.

Her family’s relationship with The Community House has grown, as has her understanding of and appreciation for the work the agency does for those who have fewer advantages, such as families served by its Willowbrook Corner program.

Her son and daughter, now 12 and 8, have participated in everything from Jodie Harrison basketball to Stage Door Fine Arts productions to School’s Out Trips. She and her husband have enjoyed fundraisers like the Community Revue and Band Together.

“There is something that every person in this family has taken advantage of. That’s why I love The Community House. You feel like there is something that’s there for you.”



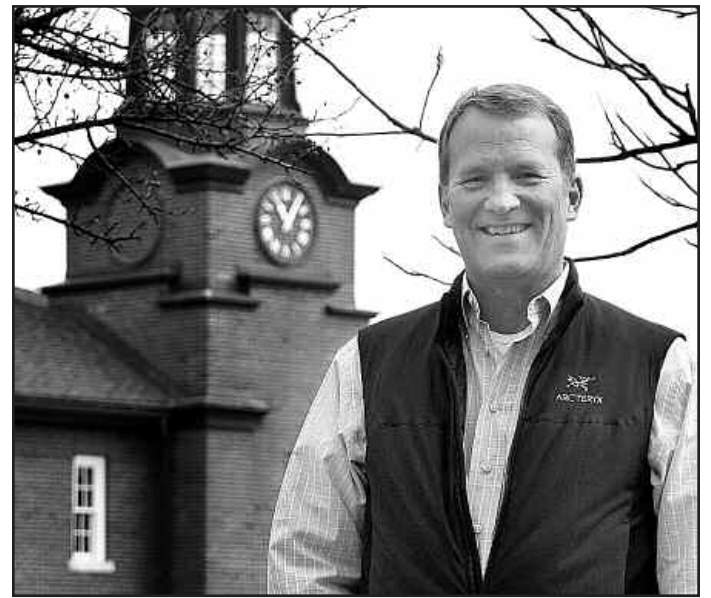
Jay Tuthill didn’t know much about The Community House when he got a call from board chairman Jim Bere in 1989 asking if he’d be interested in serving as a trustee. But he decided to accept the offer.

“I was still fairly new to town and, while I didn’t know much about it, I liked what little I knew,” he said.

Since then, Tuthill has served as board chairman, Community Revue producer and cast member, a community partner (through Tuthill Corp.) and was named volunteer of the year.

Over the past 25 years, The Community House has come to encompass for Tuthill the best of his beloved town.

“When I’m having one of those days — when someone on a cellphone cuts me off in downtown Hinsdale for a parking spot — I quite literally stop and think about The Community House,” he said. “It embodies that glue, that warm sense of community and shared destiny that make this town what it is.”



Share your thoughts about The Community House on Facebook

For some, it’s Jodie Harrison basketball.

For others, it’s the day trips offered through Active Adults.

Or it might be volunteer opportunities, services provided through the counseling department or cooking classes for kids.

The Community House touches many people in many ways, and we’d like to hear how the organiza-

tion has touched our readers.

Let everyone know what The Community House means to you by responding to the post on our Facebook page at facebook.com/thehinsdalean.

If you haven’t already done so, be sure to “like” our page and click on the link to like The Community House as well.

Making a Difference

— Making a Difference
is a yearlong partnership between
The Hinsdalean and The Community House,
whose mission is to build community
by providing inspiring
opportunities for learning, social support
and recreation.