

# Local Community: ANSWERING THE CALL TO SERVE

By Ann Stawski '93

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any not-for-profit organization, but before the recruitment process begins, there has to be someone with a vision who is committed to develop the endeavor and set the wheels in motion.

Four such visionaries who were impassioned about a cause and willing to make a difference are **Pat Wilde '61**, **Anne Taveirne '68**, **Sister Dorothy Bock '50** and **Sister Elaine Hirschenberger '65**.

These ambitious women did not plan their educations for careers in the nonprofit sector, nor dream they would establish such an organization. However, inspired by rights activities in the 1960s and 1970s, these visionaries were passionate and motivated. They identified needs within their local community and took the necessary steps that led to the launch of three successful nonprofit organizations.

Read about these four extraordinary women who truly answered the call to serve the needs of their local communities.

Anne Taveirne '68

## *In My Backyard*

**Anne Taveirne '68** surmised that creating a local initiative would help address problematic changes in her culturally diverse community. "We saw there were problems in the neighborhood to our east, and we did not want to wait to react until the problems reached us," said Taveirne, founder of the Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Inc. (LBWN).

A former School Sister of St. Francis (SSSF), Taveirne first gained experience with nonprofits when she accepted a challenge to be placed with a Milwaukee neighborhood right after the closure of the parish school. The SSSF team called itself "Walker Point House." They collaborated with neighbors to organize activities, including a local newspaper until avenues of funding ended and the project closed. A few years later, Taveirne's superiors approached her to assist in planning the 75th anniversary celebrations for the School Sisters of St. Francis chapel and motherhouse, located on Milwaukee's south side and directly west of the Walker Point House area.

Taveirne knew problems were headed to the neighborhood and envisioned her work and that of the Sisters could be larger than just the anniversary celebration.

In 1993, the first neighborhood outreach event was an ice cream social where residents gathered and toured the chapel

and motherhouse grounds and buildings. It was the first step in uniting the community. Soon after, a small group of Sisters formed a planning team and canvassed the streets, talking with residents about the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of their neighborhood. "It was a slow build, but the community understood the need we identified. Ten Sisters each brought one neighbor to the first meeting. One year later, the number of neighbors attending jumped to 50. This was much more hands-on than just helping, directing or contributing. This was local to what the people needed and they responded."

Taveirne says she was drawn to nonprofit work because of people. "I saw people struggling alone. Their children were without activities to keep them busy while they were coping with disruptive behavior on the street. I wanted to find ways to bring people together to make better things happen for themselves. It is so rewarding to see people taking charge."

Soon Volunteers In Service In Our Neighborhood (V.I.S.I.O.N.) formally organized the community's involvement. Eventually the program evolved into LBWN, a nonprofit community development organization dedicated to revitalizing three of Milwaukee's southside neighborhoods. LBWN established a foundation of volunteers, creating networks of communication to coordinate neighborhood





led by Anne Taveirne '68, the Layton Boulevard West Neighbors, Inc. (LBWN) was instrumental in revitalizing three of Milwaukee's west side neighborhoods. Pictured here are murals in the Menomonee Valley near the Urban Ecology Center and the Hank Aaron State Trail.

activities and develop a sense of community among neighborhood stakeholders.

"The success didn't happen right away, but the Sisters and neighbors were persistent. We saw what was going on locally and took small and large steps so people could make a difference before the neighborhood began to decline."

The success of the program is evident today. Because of LBWN's activities and initiatives, the neighborhood is a vibrant area where homes are well kept and neighbors come together for cleanups. Community improvements showcase the neighborhood pride: children post photos on the website, there is an annual Breakfast with Santa Claus and new businesses continue to develop. In 2006, the LBWN became one of

Milwaukee's first five "Healthy Neighborhoods," an initiative established by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Being a Healthy Neighborhood acknowledges the strategy in which neighbors and business owners work together to emphasize the neighborhood's strengths and amenities.

These days Taveirne has stepped back from her duties with LBWN and is running her own small business working with the elderly. She is proud that LBWN continues to thrive and meet the changing needs of the community. "If you have a passion for something and you see a problem, start trying to figure out who can help solve it. Then things start to happen and you need to be willing to listen, to work together, to be ready to act, and find funding and resources."

Pat Wilde '61

## Give Me Shelter

"My mother's advice was 'always help those who need to be helped,'" said **Pat Wilde '61**, founder of the Ozanam House/Safe Harbor Homeless Shelter, a women and children's shelter located in Reedsburg, Wis. Wilde was a high school and college chemistry teacher in Illinois before moving to rural Wisconsin with her husband, Bill. There they discovered a surprising level of homelessness and poverty.

Wilde saw an opportunity to provide temporary shelter to women and children who had landed on hard times, as well as provide tools and resources to help them achieve independence. Wilde and her team did not have formal training or experience running a shelter, but they were determined to succeed. First, they studied how other shelters operated and then adapted rules and regulations.

"I had a lot to learn. In an endeavor like this, you take a few steps ahead and fall back a few, but you always keep moving forward." Wilde worked with local organizations, churches, youth groups and municipalities to develop the organization's message. This generated community awareness and garnered support.

Wilde led the purchase of a home for the shelter. With donated financial resources, more than 100 volunteers from her church and other churches, corporations and the Reedsburg community renovated the building. When the Ozanam House opened in 2007, its mission was simple: to empower residents to become confident, independent, stable and productive members of society. In 2010, the shelter was renamed Safe Harbor and began to operate independently. Safe Harbor is a nonprofit that relies solely on fundraising, individual and corporate donations. It does not receive any state or federal funding.

In its first year, the shelter accommodated 12 women. In 2012, it assisted 39 women and 25 children. "We developed a strict admissions policy and implemented goal setting with weekly assessments. We wanted our community to succeed, and so we provided assistance for income, budgeting, agencies, life skills and parenting courses."



Pat Wilde '61, founder of Ozanam House / Safe Harbor Homeless Shelter in Reedsburg, Wis., sought the necessary financial and volunteer resources to purchase a home for the shelter and complete its successful renovation.

supports fundraising events and donates to the upkeep. She is immensely proud of the shelter's staff and volunteers and their positive impact on the community and those they serve. "When you go into a career, it's important to make a difference. You go with your heart," said Wilde. "One way to do that is to help those who have the greatest need. At the same time you'll find you probably get more out of it than you're giving."

## Sister Dorothy Bock '50 and Sister Elaine Hirschenberger '65

### *The Center of the Web*

Starting a nonprofit doesn't mean doing it alone. And if you lead with another person for 38 years, there has to be camaraderie to sustain the relationship through the decades. "We're yin and yang," said **Sister Elaine Hirschenberger '65** of her counterpart, **Sister Dorothy Bock '50**. "Each time we take a personality or style test, it confirms we are polar opposites. But it's those complementary skills, talents and interests that allow us to work so well together."

That relationship has certainly served well the community of Rockford, Ill., where Bock and Hirschenberger founded Womanspace in 1975. Womanspace is an interfaith center, directed toward promoting women's spirituality with emphasis on the arts, psychological well-being and holistic health. The genesis of Womanspace actually occurred during the time Bock and Hirschenberger were undergraduates at Alverno College. Each woman found the College's initiative of empowering women inspirational. However, it wasn't until they were both teaching in the humanities department at Driscoll High School in Illinois where they conceptualized the idea of Womanspace.

Their dream was to provide a place to empower women through art and creativity. Then they got practical.

They spoke with their School Sisters of St. Francis community and then other groups in Rockford to explore the vision for a women's center. Finding affirmation for the concept, they then spoke with people already doing nonprofit work, and began cultivating relationships with like-minded people who were concerned with their mission and goals.

"If you can draw a picture of your organization, you can bring it into being," said Hirschenberger. "Every time we draw Womanspace, it is a circular model with extensions that radiate out, looking very much like a web. The thing that never changes is the core center." Adds Bock, "It's the same for people. If a woman is deeply in touch with her own center, she can then reach out in a healthy and creative way to others. Our logo is a web for that very reason."

Womanspace started out small in a rented, two-room office. Because it had no meeting space, the center's first large programs were held throughout the Rockford community in any venue that would welcome them — churches, schools and businesses. Through that initial outreach, Womanspace developed solid partnerships and community support. It has never been funded by any outside group but instead operates on membership dues, donations and fees for the services

and programs offered. Over the years, Womanspace has impacted 30,000 individuals.

"Today we own a 10-room building, an adjacent teaching studio and galleries, and seven beautiful acres. We have several gardens, a large labyrinth that attracts many visitors, and a new outdoor pavilion," said Hirschenberger. During a recent garden walk featuring the award-winning Womanspace gardens, more than 200 people visited the space for the first time and experienced the peace and unity the organization brings to the community.

Womanspace continues to evolve through innovative ideas and programs, and offers curriculum and services that are fresh and unique. "To support and encourage the many talented artists in Womanspace, we created our Gallery2Go gift shop," said Hirschenberger. Gallery2Go offers unique creations by more than 40 artists, and won Womanspace an innovation award from the Northern Illinois Center for Non-Profit Excellence.

Bock and Hirschenberger never anticipated they would lead such a successful nonprofit program, but together they always believed they could make a difference. Both continue to serve at Womanspace: Hirschenberger as executive director and Bock as development director. "When you choose a new career, you have to follow the inner-core of your own passion. First take care of yourself and your health, but continue to serve. Your work needs to be part of your own heart and soul," said Bock. "It's a fluid model for leadership, one that adjusts and harmonizes to the individual and the cause."

Starting a nonprofit service can be a circuitous route — no one ever starts or ends at the same place, but the mission is always front and center. These three organizations were created by women identifying needs in the community and then taking action.

Running a nonprofit is about helping people take charge of their own lives, their education or their neighborhoods. It's about using passion to enhance a community and then discovering the rewards. Not everyone starts out knowing exactly where their career will take them, but as these four Alverno alumnae discovered, where they landed is just about the happiest place on earth. ■

Sisters Dorothy Bock '50 and Elaine Hirschenberger, pictured to the left, founded Womanspace, an interfaith center dedicated to promoting women's spirituality with emphasis on the arts, psychological well-being and holistic health.

