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MAGAZINE

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THE VILLAGE OF MERICI



BUILDING A VILLAGE

Writer / Julie Yates
Photography Provided

The Village of Merici is a community for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who are supported and guided while making their own independent choices. About a third of the individuals involved in the nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization's programs reside at the Merici Village Apartments, located at 5707 Lawton Loop East Drive.

Currently, 200 individuals are on a waiting list as funds are being raised to renovate a second building, also on the loop of the historic Fort Benjamin Harrison campus. This month, donors have the opportunity to double the impact of every dollar they give

during a one-million-dollar match challenge ending October 1st. Meeting this monetary goal will not only breathe new life into an old building but will positively impact the lives of IDD individuals and their families.

The second building will result in 38 additional housing units and be restored in the same manner as the existing Merici Village Apartments, which after being decommissioned in 1991, remained empty until renovated. Built between 1903 and 1904, the character of the building remains with high ceilings and an exposed original beam in every apartment. Large doorways and huge bathrooms make the dwelling ADA accessible, residents or their friends in wheel chairs can move around easily.

Building renewal is just a small facet of the transformation taking place within the Village of Merici model. Different than a traditional group home setting, it was opened in 2014 after several years of gathering input from families and researching similar sites across the United States and internationally. The community is a place where, with the support of a staff of 50 coaches, IDD individuals are free to make their own choices regarding activities and friendships.

Residents, who pay a rent of 30% of their income, have varying disabilities such as cerebral palsy, down syndrome, or autism. Ages range from mid-twenties to middle-aged. Many participate in integrated



employment or volunteer outside of the apartment building. Some need 24-hour care for most life skills. All are supported in finding opportunities for as much or little involvement they desire.

“For Angie, her life changed because she got 20 friends,” says Beth Becher, mother of resident Angie Cain. “It transformed our lives because she was so much happier. She saw her sisters grow up and move out of the family house, and she wanted to do that too. She wanted friends she could choose and she was able to develop those relationships.”

Cain flourishes under the support of Village of Merici. Every week she works one day at Kohl’s Department Store, three days at YMCA and one day at Down Syndrome Indiana. One of her favorite activities is gardening club. She raises tomatoes, kale, lettuce, herbs and flowers which she shares with others and uses in her kitchen when she cooks her meals. She is a member of the cooking club and with the help of a coach, she meal plans and makes a grocery list.

“I like everybody and I like that I get to do my own thing like shooting pool and music therapy,” says resident Steve Mailloux. “I volunteer at the VA and go to Sertoma Bingo and Lunch each month.”

“There was nothing for Steve after he graduated from high school,” says Mailloux’s sister Lisa Fohl. “He and his friends didn’t drive and they lost contact with each other. Loneliness can be the biggest disability of all. The friendships he has formed and his activities make his life rich. This community is not a place, it is an experience.”

The inside of Cain’s and Mailloux’s apartments reflect their own individual interests and tastes. Cain’s looks like any other typical millennial-style dwelling. The décor looks Pinterest-influenced and her own colorful artwork hangs on the walls. Mailloux’s apartment is filled with gifts from family and friends such as a replica of a tandem bike, a retro lunch box, sports logos and huge oversize posters of television shows he loved growing up such as Knight Rider.



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villageofmerici.org



CONNECT

“When you are a parent or guardian of an IDD individual, you wonder, ‘What will happen to them as I age and after I have passed on?’ Village of Merici answers that. The Village meets people where they are. It allows individuals with disabilities to be independent and live their own lives,” Fohl says.

To Donate to the Build the Village Capital Campaign visit villageofmerici.org/build-the-village.

The Village of Merici is located at 5707 Lawton Loop East Drive in Indianapolis. For more information, visit villageofmerici.org or call 317-292-9408.