



Common Place...*where love works!*

# GOODNEWS

December 2011

Connie Voss  
Managing Editor

Stephanie Marchand  
Editor

*Our Mission is to strive to eliminate the root causes of poverty, racism, and other social injustices by recognizing the dignity and self-worth inherent in each person.*

**Common Place  
Board Chair**  
Roberta Koscielski

**Board Officers**  
Jim Bremner  
Phil Cline  
Cheryl Dawson



## A message from the Board of Governors President

Dear Friends,

I am writing this letter in early December, and while Thanksgiving has passed, the time for thanks is now! This month marks my final Common Place Board of Governors meeting as president. This year we have been fortunate to have several new board members join us in serving Common Place. I thank them and all of our board members for their commitment to the families we serve. At the December board meeting, we elected a slate of officers which includes Jim Bremner (Winter Insurance) as president, Cheryl Dawson (Heartland Bank) as vice-president, Lindsay Harms (Standard Heating & Cooling) as secretary, and Phil Cline (Retired) as treasurer. These four board members have already shown their devotion to the mission of Common Place and I am truly excited about these dynamic people leading our charge.

I certainly want to thank Executive Director Connie Voss and her staff for the outstanding dedication and diverse talents they provide to us. They truly care about each person who comes through the doors of Common Place and their work is changing the lives of adults and children every day.

Most of all, I want to express my appreciation to everyone who has given time, talents, or funding to Common Place. Whether you are a volunteer who has donated hours to help a child get better grades in school, a tutor who has helped an adult learn to read, or a donor who has enabled our programs to continue and expand, know that you are supporting adults and children who are working together to make Peoria better by eliminating the causes of poverty and other social injustices.

I conclude with a reminder that your help is still needed at Common Place. As an example, the number of adults coming to Common Place for help in improving their reading, writing, and math skills has risen dramatically in the past year. We need more volunteer tutors to keep up with this demand so that we can begin working with them immediately rather than putting them on a waiting list. Common Place also needs financial contributions as you are able, in order to carry on the good work of our staff and volunteers that makes a difference in lives every day. Whether you can help us out by donating time, talents, or funding, please consider putting Common Place on your list of resolutions for 2012.

Wishing you Happy Holidays and a Joyous New Year!

Roberta Koscielski

## Thank you United Way Day of Caring!

The Heart of Illinois United Way's Day of Caring on September 10, brought two groups of energetic, hard-working individuals to Common Place from Illinois Central College and Ameren CILCO for yard work and general cleaning and organizing. What a difference these dedicated volunteers made for Common Place and the families we serve! Thank you HOI United Way, ICC, and Ameren for caring and serving your community!



*Ameren employees worked up a sweat mowing, trimming, and raking around Common Place grounds*



*ICC employees cleaned and organized an office and computer lab.*



*ICC employees take time out to pose for a group photo before calling it a day*

### ***Did you know surfing the Internet can benefit Common Place?***

*Common Place is now on the GoodSearch website. GoodSearch is a search engine (like Google) that raises funds for charity every time you search. GoodSearch also runs the GoodShop site. So, if you prefer to skip the crowds and shop online you can help Common Place receive a percentage of your online sales. Over 2,500 stores participate in the GoodShop program. When you shop at stores that participate in the GoodShop program and have downloaded the GoodSearch toolbar, you will have access to special coupons. Please visit the GoodSearch website: [goodsearch.com](http://goodsearch.com), for directions on how to download the toolbar and add Common Place as your charity of choice.*

### **Do you need to make a distribution from your IRA?**

You can comply with the Tax Relief Act of 2010 and help support Common Place programs at the same time! If you are required to take a minimum distribution from your IRA, you can make a direct donation to Common Place without needing to pay income tax.

### **Email Address Wanted**

We are seeking email addresses and yours is wanted! By providing your email address you are helping to ease our budget so we can use funds directly for our literacy programs. Your email address can be sent to: [commonplace@sbcglobal.net](mailto:commonplace@sbcglobal.net). Although Common Place's preference is to go paperless for our newsletter, you may still receive it by regular mail if prefer.

### **Scholastic book fair provided books for program participants**

With the end of the year upon us we want to take a moment to express our gratitude for your continued support this year. Unfortunately the need is never-ending and ever-growing. Common Place is fortunate this holiday season to have participated in a Scholastic book fair held December 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> at the former Borders location at the Shoppes at Grand Prairie. The sale provided new books for our Common Place program participants.



...Where love works!

### Last year at Common Place. . . .

**Adult Literacy Program** – 128 adult learners improved their quality of life by building reading and life skills.

**Youth After-School Programs** --

- 98% improved school grades in core academic subjects.
- 95% developed and demonstrated improved social skills, positive character development, problem solving and decision making skills.
- 95% in grades 5-12 learned about career choices, pursuing higher education, and formed goals for the future.

**Summer Youth Programs** – 80 children and youth spent their summer in positive activities and built job skills in a safe, caring environment.

**Special Programs** --

- 25 K-4 children learned to appreciate those different from them through Cultural Tales Programs, celebrating other cultures through reading, music, dance, food and other activities.
- 37 adults and children visited medieval times through reading together activities and field trips.
- Dozens of our families celebrated reading together and received take-home books at Family Reading Nights.
- 30 parents gained skills and confidence in helping their children with their homework as well as how to better communicate with schools through Operation Education workshops.

**Emergency Food Pantry** -- an average of 320 families a month benefitted from much-needed and appreciated bags of emergency food.



### How can you help?

- \$25 provides books for 1 family for all of this year's Family Reading Nights.
- \$50 provides take-home books for 20 children.
- \$98 provides weekly stipends for one child in a summer youth work program.
- \$91 provides 1 week of youth after-school programming for 1 child.
- \$100 will provide a week of healthy after-school snacks for 79 children and a nutritious dinner for 20 high school youths.
- \$200 provides new tutors with a full day of training.
- \$500 provides books for one class of adult learners for 6 months of reading together.
- \$1,000 provides a college scholarship for one high school intern.

## Community Involvement Fills Empty Pantry Shelves

Like most pantries in the Peoria community, Common Place's food pantry has been busier than ever. Most of the increased need is due to the economy's recession.

The reasons families seek our help with food varies: loss of job, unexpected turn in health status, change in marital status, or taking care of additional family members.

### Here's how our pantry has grown:

2008 – 1,210 adults and children; 4,840 meals  
2009 – 2,757 adults and children; 11,028 meals  
2010 – 3,068 adults and children; 15,340 meals  
2011 – 4,196 adults and children; 19,432 meals! (before December's total)

Because of the increase in the number of families served, Common Place's pantry shelves became bare. We are very grateful for the response our community has given us to help us refill our shelves and meet the need of our neighbors. We have had...

- a couple from Texas visiting friends stop by with groceries
- a young Banner Elementary student donated money, turkeys, and non-perishable food items because she was so touched by the needs
- a woman from Galesburg drove twice to Common Place to deliver food
- a retired gentleman stopped by twice to give financially what he felt was the right thing to do
- company employees, a preschool, and a middle school placed collection boxes at their facilities
- area motorcycle clubs donated thirteen huge boxes of non-perishable food
- and, many more stories.

Donations for the pantry are accepted throughout the year, however we see a greater need to restock our shelves during holidays and when children are out of school. If you'd like more information on how you can donate, or what we need in our pantry, please call Common Place at 309-674-3315. Thank you for your heartfelt response to our need to help our neighbors!



*Left: Employees from Hallmark Cards in Metamora collected food to help fill our pantry shelves.*

*Right: Kristen Fran receives a grateful hug from Common Place staff member, Linda Hoskins, for responding to the article written in the Peoria Journal Star, which stated our need for food donations.*



## **We Are Thankful for Our Grants!**

With the uncertain times of the last couple years, we wait with anticipation as the response for each grant application comes through---hoping that we haven't lost any, or that amounts funded are not substantially decreased. We are happy to report that all of our main grants have been renewed at the same or nearly the same amount as last year! The exception is the FEMA money for the food pantry, which was decreased for everyone; however the generous donations of food and funds from the community are filling the gap. For Adult Literacy, our Secretary of State Literacy grant was again renewed for \$61,500. Children, youth and families will benefit from our youth grants: Teen Reach, for \$44,570; CDBG funding for Promising Futures for \$12,166 and Future Quest for \$11,672. Also, the Robert W. Leu Family Charitable Fund and the Eugene and Harriet Swager Fund of the Community Foundation of Central Illinois are awarding a total of \$5,388 to *Soul Expression*, a project for our young people to learn together and to express their emotions through the performing arts. We are thankful for the generosity of our funding sources, and for the staff members and volunteers who live up to their high expectations of providing quality programs for our Common Place families.

## **Operation Education: Helping parents relate to their child's education**

Operation Education is the result of a compilation of years of experience working with children, and influences from workshops on parental involvement, and was designed for the parents of Common Place's youth programs. One influence stemmed from attendance at the Peoria District 150 Schools Parental Involvement Institute with Dr. Samuel Betances and Dr. Laura Souder, geared "to close the achievement gap with children of poverty in the middle class place called school."

Operation Education, developed by former Common Place Director of Youth programs, Shirley Dresden and Common Place's current Director of Youth programs, Helen Jenkins, is designed to lend support to parents by giving them the tools they need to communicate with teachers, and the knowledge to help their children succeed in school.

The youth staff held an Operation Education session in October to help parents relate to teachers and demonstrated four scenarios they may encounter at a parent-teacher conference. Four parents were asked to

volunteer while four staff members played the role of teachers, each with a different teaching style and personality. The four situations covered were, authoritative, detached, permissive, and authoritarian. Role playing gave parents ways to understand the teacher and questions they can ask their child's teacher.

The Common Place youth staff recognizes the need for parent involvement and good parent/teacher communication. Preparing parents and giving them tools they can use to help their child to succeed in school benefits the child, and allows a great rapport between the school and home.

### ***Common Place's Wish List for 2012***

- Sturdy card tables
- Healthy snacks and juice for youth programs
- Liquid hand soap
- Bleach
- Bottles of hand sanitizer
- Cans of disinfectant spray
- Cans of air fresheners
- Paper towels
- Paper napkins
- Coffee supplies: regular & decaf coffee, creamer, and sugar



### **Common Place Holiday Schedule**

Common Place will be closed on the following dates:



*We thank you for your continued support and wish you a safe and happy holiday season!*



•Fri., December 23    •Mon., December 26  
•Fri., December 30

•Mon., Jan. 2, 2012    •Mon., January 16

## Meeting the Challenge of Expanding Adult Literacy Needs

We didn't expect it. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, every existing class space and beyond is being used by adult literacy classes. Even the large meeting room on the second floor which was once a church sanctuary, houses three classes on those days. Those classes outgrew their usual space.

Yes, one-on-one tutoring for adults with reading needs is still our focus, with tutor-learner pairs meeting at Common Place, public libraries, First United Methodist Loaves and Fish program, the Franciscan Center, and requests for three additional locations. The small group classes have grown in size and number as the enrollment in the Adult Literacy Program has climbed.



Five years ago, our total Adult Literacy enrollment for the year was 127 adult learners. This year, the enrollment is at 112---*for only the first 3 months of the year!* That isn't even counting the new addition of an ICC GED class and a Head Start ESL class on site. While the reasons adults enroll are many and varied, the closing of District 150 adult education is one reason; but we do also know that our enrollment has climbed as the economy declined. A tight job market can be a strong motivator.

As the number of adult learners increases, so do special needs and interests. In addition to adding the second New Challenges (special needs) class, additional levels of reading and math classes have been added, an additional sewing class (sewing clothing, knitting and other sewing-related skills), and the Eye on Success class which is for young adults, ages 17-24. GED is not our main focus (except for our ICC GED class), but we have nevertheless recently had 6 learners pass their Constitution Test (a portion of the GED requirement) and 3 learners obtain their GED.

All this has caused some changes, from needing to limit the amount of coffee we make, to tightened rules and expectations, to streamlining our record keeping processes. However, *the heart of our Adult Literacy Program--whether one-on-one tutoring or in a classroom setting—is meeting the varied and individual learning needs of all ages of adults as well as building close relationships in order to support them in their learning.*

Our Adult Literacy Program tutors are some of the most dedicated individuals you could ever meet, and many of them are taking on extra responsibility. While the learner enrollment has climbed, the number of tutors is the lowest it has been in a long time. It seems today, people everywhere are stretched.

There is an upcoming tutor training for new tutors in January. ***Please consider making a life-changing difference in the life of an adult learner yourself by becoming a tutor, or by spreading the word to others who might be interested in the opportunity to help adults with their reading.*** Call Common Place at 674-3315 if you would like more information, would like to register or be on the mailing list, or if you would like us to get more information to a group, church, or individual that might be interested. You can make a difference!







## Winter Items Needed

Please consider the gift of warmth this winter by donating both adult and youth hats, scarves, mittens, gloves, new and gently used blankets, and sweaters for program participants and their families, and neighbors.



## 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary for Walk for Reading

September 11<sup>th</sup> marked a special day for Common Place as we celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary for our Walk for Reading. Funds raised benefits our adult literacy programs, after school youth programs, youth tutoring, summer youth activities, and family reading programs. Thanks for supporting Common Place and helping us raise awareness for literacy programs!



*Above: Supporters of Common Place start the 3-mile "Novel" walk.*



*Universalist Unitarian Church won the Traveling Trophy this year with the most sponsorships for a group. Nancy Rakoff & John Minor, members from the U.U. Church*



*Common Place youth staff demonstrate a chant the children learned during the summer about the rules of a sentence for the walk participants.*

*Below: Common Place staff member, Allie Messmore, and her husband, jump for joy as they finished the 1-mile "Short Story" walk.*



*Supporters of all ages attended the Walk for Reading*



*This "man's best friend" enjoys advertising Common Place's Walk for Reading.*



*Judy & Dale Ryan walk to support Common Place's programs. Dale is a tutor in our Adult Literacy Program.*

COMMON PLACE  
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Nonprofit Org.  
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Peoria, Illinois  
Permit No. 664

Please call or  
email us if you  
would like to be  
removed from  
our mailing list.

**Or Current Resident**

**Yes! I want to help with the Annual Campaign.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

I/We pledge to support Common Place's Literacy Programs:  
\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$75 \_\_\_\_\_ Other \$\_\_\_\_\_ Check enclosed for \$\_\_\_\_\_

Or, Pledge will be paid as follows: \_\_\_\_\_ All at once \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_