Annual Report
- 2023 -

Providing an innovative approach to services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities focused on independent living.

Celebrating the opening of our second location!

VILLAGE OF merici

Letter from the Executive Director

What a huge year!

I'm excited to share this annual report with you as 2023 proved to be a big year for the Village of Merici.

One of the biggest highlights of the year saw the completion of our second location, a beautiful integrated housing community in Carmel, Indiana. We are honored to have partnered with Old Town Companies with this project and pleased to manage 40 attainable apartments designated for adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities within this new community. We are grateful to the members of the Old Town team for their vision of an integrated model and commitment to provide attainable housing on Indy's north side.

Shortly before the pandemic several years ago, we had established the Merici Kitchen Project, a commercial kitchen located at Merici Village Apartments with the intent of establishing a variety of cooking classes and pre-employment training. We were able to utilize the kitchen during the pandemic on an individual basis with one-on-one personal skills development. In July, we hired a kitchen manager and restarted the project with a series of group cooking classes that filled immediately. We look forward to continued utilization of this space as we develop many new opportunities in the coming year.

After a year, The Cincy Hat Project continues to create new awareness for our mission. We are thrilled that Ted Karras was nominated by the Cincinnati Bengals for the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award through his direct involvement with the individuals we support. We appreciate his time and dedication to our organization.

Based on the number of wonderful projects already in the works, we anticipate another big year ahead. Thank you for your continued support in our efforts as we strive to support more adults with disabilities. We couldn't do it without you.

With appreciation,

Colleen Renie

Colleen Renie
Executive Director

VILLAGE OF merici
10 Years

Leadership

Toby McClamroch*
Tim Specht*
Victoria Pierceall*
Jill Rusk*

Carl Becker
Ashley Dickerson
Barb Fleming-Cecil
Frank Hutnicke

PJ Loehrer
Dave McDowell
Loui Lord Nelson
Barney Quinn

Patrick Schaefer
Danielle Shockey
Jeffrey Yu

*denotes executive officers

Merici Kitchen Project is Back in Action

It has taken a while, but the Merici Kitchen Project is now in full swing. The commercial kitchen located within Merici Village Apartments, has been in the works for quite a while. What once began with funding acquisition in 2017-18 through several grantors, construction completion in 2019, and was just getting off the ground when the pandemic began, limiting training to one-on-one sessions.

The kitchen saw very limited use until mid-2023 after all pandemic restrictions were lifted, and a kitchen manager was hired. Since that time, the kitchen has flourished with more than 30 different participants attending classes during the last half of the year. Classes have been focused on basic skills building, preparation and cooking, nutrition, and at-home meal preparation with goals toward personal independence.

During the month of November, awareness and gratitude of others was incorporated when kitchen classes created a variety of baked goods and delivered them to community service organizations within the Lawrence area.

As the Merici Kitchen Project continues to develop, plans are underway to expand class options, incorporate produce and herbs from the courtyard garden, and work to increase individual knowledge and skills.

Second Location is Now Open in Carmel

Offering 40 attainable apartments to those with disabilities.

It's officially open! The North End Project in Carmel, a partnership between Village of Merici, Old Town Companies, and Rdoor Housing Corporation, has celebrated the grand opening. The multi-year project began with a Moving Forward 2020 Grant awarded through the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCDA). This master development includes single-family residences, townhomes, apartments, offices, and retail space.

North End Apartments, offers 168 units with 40 apartments designated at an attainable rate for adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities. With affordable housing at a crisis level throughout the state of Indiana, the 40 units were in high demand. As hundreds of applicants applied for the 40 apartments, a lottery was held to determine the final occupants. This magnificent community is the largest attainable housing initiative created in Carmel.

The Village of Merici is honored to have partnered with Old Town Companies and Rdoor in this project and appreciate their understanding and commitment to making beautiful, attainable housing a reality for those with disabilities.

Testimonies

*"Thank you" doesn't seem like it truly expresses the **gratitude** that we have for what the Village of Merici and Old Town partnership has created for our family."*

*"It's been 5+ months since I've moved into North End, and I'm consistently reminded of how much of a **blessing** it has been."*

*"Village of Merici - if you ever wonder whether what you do matters, here's your reminder - it does. You're enabling **miracles.**"*

*"Our daughter attends almost all community and Village of Merici events and has grown tremendously in her social skills from these. The interactions have been crucial in enhancing her **sense of belonging** and happiness."*

*"I'm so blessed to be with Village of Merici and what they have done for me. They have put me in a place where **I can be myself.** I just can't be happier."*

*"North End is a safe, supportive, and enriching environment for my daughter. The experience has been transformative in allowing her to establish **independence** while still feeling connected to a community that respects and supports her individually."*

Technology is Key:

North End incorporates advanced technologies throughout the community. Each of the 40 individuals supported through the Village of Merici, receive a technology assessment with Smart technology customized to each individual's need to improve independent living.

Employment Opportunities:

North End is home to several retail shops, creating convenient employment opportunities. Our gratitude to Indie Coffee Roasters, Le Petit Gateau Bakery, and Fields Market Garden.

Village of Merici continues to excel with accreditation through one of the industry's highest standard.

What is CARF Accreditation?

CARF, formerly known as the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, is an international organization focused on advancing the quality of health and human services and organizational structure used for best practice outcomes.

Providers that meet CARF standards have demonstrated their commitment to being among the best available.

This onsite rigorous examination process includes 984 review points and includes an in-depth look into service standards, compliance, risk management, peer networking and guidance, and stakeholder satisfaction.

Village of Merici excelled in each of the 984 review points, achieving the top 3% of all organizations reviewed internationally.

Kudos to the amazing Village of Merici staff!

Quotes pulled from the report:

"Village of Merici has set the gold standard for providing quality services and collaboration with community partners."

"It is common knowledge that the Village of Merici will go above and beyond to help the people it supports to create a life they can be happy with."

"The Village of Merici's leadership illustrates a genuine dedication to its mission and true appreciation for its staff and the services it provides."

"The staff shows empathy and respect to the people it supports."

"Village of Merici is recognized throughout the state of Indiana as a leader in providing high-quality services to people with disabilities."

"The success of the people Village of Merici supports helps them to continue to keep dreaming and not lose hope, to not forget that they matter, and to press forward through the obstacles they have been presented."

In Memory of Erica Marie Herran

October 10, 1982 – October 7, 2023

Erica Marie Herran, 40 of Indianapolis, was such a sweet, loving, and amazing woman. She is still intensely missed by so many and not a day goes by that I, her Team Leader at the Village of Merici and Life Skills Coach of three years, do not think of her, as I know so many others feel the same way. Erica was the strongest woman I know. She overcame so many obstacles, both medically and emotionally, from such a young age. She persevered through many adversities throughout her life and always did so with a positive mindset, a smile, and her oh so hearty laugh. I remember we would always joke about how she had 9 lives and how I needed to know her secret. Erica was such a thoughtful person. She always gave to others very personalized gifts or verbal praise. She had a passion for food crafting, like decorating or making cookies, desserts, and candies. I remember when I supported Erica during my first pregnancy and struggled with a challenging birth and low milk supply. This woman went out of her way to look up and research foods that would help boost my supply, and then made up three different batches of protein power balls to give me to help. I still make those things today. Erica was such a good listener and genuinely cared about others. She had a memory of a dolphin too, never forgetting a detail, and was quick witted. She always made it a point to catch up on how my children were doing, asking about milestones and funny chaos that ensued. We often spent our time talking and laughing about those crazy stories and moments of her dog Max and his shenanigans. I miss that. He is a Boston Terrier and Shih Tzu mix, and she loved and pampered him. Max was Erica's best friend and always by her side, even up until her last days.

Erica was an athlete in the National and World Transplant Games, as well as in Special Olympics. Her sports included Basketball, Bocce, Bowling, Cornhole, Golf, Swimming, and Track and Field. Swimming was her favorite event, beginning when she was just six years of age and continuing through 2022. She was also a member of Crossroads of America Scout Band. Even in her last year of life, when her medical emergencies and restrictions prevented her from participating in some sports, she still made it a point to show up to practice to engage with her teammates and show her support. Erica was recognized by her efforts, sportsmanship, and winnings with medals and ribbon awards and confidently displayed them all around her office, bedrooms, and home neatly in display cases. One of Erica's hobbies was organizing and we, like many others, often joked about how she kept the Container Store in business.

Erica Marie Herran was such a sweet and loving woman. Her mother, like many, is so proud of all her accomplishments and the love she showed and poured out to others. Erica is so incredibly missed but is finally at peace. She is survived by her parents and her brother, Andrew Herran. She was proceeded in death by her brother, Nicholas Herran, earlier this year. Again, despite all that Erica endured and lived with and through, she always made it a point to never focus on the negative, but instead, the positive. She was incredible. We love and miss you, Erica.

Written by Ashley Wiley

Team Leader & Life Skills Coach

The Power of a Hat

By now, most of those who are familiar with the Village of Merici, have heard about The Cincy Hat, but you probably haven't heard all of the incredible ways a simple hat with a dedicated spokesperson can have such a huge impact on a nonprofit organization.

Ted Karras, Center for the NFL Cincinnati Bengals has been a long-time supporter of the Village of Merici. When he signed with the Bengals for the 2022 season, he created a gift for fellow teammates as a token of friendship and appreciation for being a part of the team. As players began to wear the hat, media began to notice and inquire where the hat could be purchased. Realizing the increasing requests, Ted decided to have hats produced with all proceeds going to support the Village of Merici. It has been a beautiful, wild ride ever since. Here are a few milestones of The Cincy Hat.

The Indy Hat

In honor of the iconic Indianapolis 500, a race-themed Indy version was created. www.theindyhat.com

Pop-Up Events

In-person events took place around downtown Cincinnati with new styles of Cincy Hat merchandise for sale at the in-person events.

The Big Reveal

Ted Karras was selected as the Cincinnati Bengals 2023 Walter Payton Man of the Year Nominee for his work and dedication to the mission of the Village of Merici. We were honored to be able to celebrate this amazing nomination with Ted.

My Cause My Cleats

Both the Village of Merici and The Cincy Hat were represented when Ted Karras and teammate, Alex Cappa played in custom cleats during the NFL's My Cause My Cleats weekend.

Once in a Lifetime Game

In honor of Ted's Man of the Year nomination, the Cincinnati Bengals hosted 30 members from the Village of Merici family to an amazing game in mid-December. Merici attendees were treated like royalty throughout the day enjoying a suite, participation in the mid-field half-time presentation, an incredible win for the Bengals in overtime, and post-game celebration on the field with Ted Karras and quarterback Jake Browning. It was an unforgettable day.

We've Gone Retail

The Cincy Hat merchandise continues to grow with hats being sold in ten current retail locations throughout the Cincinnati area.

Winning the Fan Vote and $35,000

Although the final candidate for the prestigious Walter Payton Man of the Year Award is determined by the NFL, Nationwide sponsors a "Fan Favorite" Charity Challenge portion where football fans can literally vote for their favorite nominee. The Who Dey Nation in Cincinnati and the Village of Merici in Indianapolis took this challenge very seriously. Votes were accumulated over several weeks. With 2.4 million votes, Ted Karras won the Fan Favorite Challenge! For Ted's first place finish, Nationwide presented a check for $35,000 to Ted and the Village of Merici.

What's Next?

Plans are in the works for additional retail partnerships into golf pro shops. New versions of the Indy Hat and Cincinnati Reds-themed product line.

It Takes a Village to Keep Up with the Hat Orders

There are a lot of things that go into packing and shipping thousands of orders. Thankfully, many individuals have participated in the variety of work skills opportunities created by The Cincy Hat Project.

By The Numbers

In the first 14 months of business, more than 26,000 hats and beanies have been sold and shipped to every state in the nation and other countries with gross sales exceeding

$1.2M!

With Growth Comes New Job Opportunities – Now Hiring!

Lawrence • Carmel
With two locations and a third on the way, the Village of Merici is hiring.
Full and part-time positions available • Flexible schedule • Competitive pay
To learn more or apply online: www.villageofmerici.org/employment

Want To Get More Involved?

Merici City Rides – Drivers Needed

Lawrence • Carmel
One of the greatest obstacles faced by adults with disabilities is not being able to drive. Not having transportation significantly limits one's ability to integrate into the community, leaving a large percentage of individuals feeling isolated and lonely. Consider giving your time to be a volunteer driver today.

- Easy curbside pick-up and drop off
- One-way or round-trip options
- Flexibility – volunteer a little or a lot, whatever works best for your schedule

Drivers needed in Lawrence and Carmel.
For more information or to sign up https://villageofmerici.org/volunteer-merici-city-rides/

Number of miles our volunteer drivers drove in 2023:

22,527

Looking for Volunteers

Want to make a difference in someone's life?
We have lots of opportunities:
- Book Club moderator
- Help with events
- Teach a class or share your talent
- Share your knowledge of the Carmel area

Volunteers are needed in Lawrence and Carmel.
For more information on ways to help
https://villageofmerici.org/how-can-i-help/

A Huge Thank You to Everyone Who Played a Part in Making 2023 a Truly Unforgettable Year!

Families • Donors • Volunteers • Corporate Sponsors • Grantors
Housing Partners • Everyone who purchased Cincy/Indy gear

We are grateful for your involvement and continued support.

2023 IMPACT

Number of individuals that Village of Merici supported = **130**

Number of one-on-one, direct support hours = **40,623**

Number of miles driven by coaches in support of individuals = **91,395**

Number of affordable apartments for adults with disabilities = **60**

What's Next?

Why Can't Someone with a Disability Own Their Own Home?

The wait is almost over! A second Lawrence location will open in the fall. We are thrilled to present a new concept in affordable housing. The Brunette, offering 32 beautiful condominium units, challenges the norm for housing opportunities for adults with disabilities by offering the possibility of home ownership.

Most adults with disabilities live at the lowest socio-economic level and receive subsidy through two possible Indiana housing choice vouchers. To be eligible to receive state subsidy, all combined income for an adult with disabilities, must remain under $2,000 per month. Not only does this system perpetuate the cycle of poverty, but it does not provide much possibility for ever being able to attain permanent long-term housing.

There are local lending institutions that do offer significant loan opportunities for someone with a disability to own their own home. Home ownership is an asset that does not affect Medicaid benefits. This allows The Brunette to offer the opportunity for an adult with disabilities to own their own home, a concept that the Village of Merici is honored to offer.

Please note, all 32 condominiums in The Brunette have been sold with no availability at this time. If you are interested in future Village of Merici affordable housing options, please call (317) 292-9408.

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Follow along!

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@villageofmerici

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