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staff and bus drivers. Sczesny understands the importance of community outreach and has gained many neighborhood volunteers from such organizations as Butler University, St. Thomas Aquinas, School 84, Ascension Health Hospital and the Catholic Charities Senior Companion Program. She is able to “tap into their talents” and is grateful for their help.

Sczesny really enjoys getting to know each adult in the program and appreciates that her staff creates a “life story” for each person. Some of the participants experience confusion

and these booklets, which contain special memories and photos enable the adults to reminisce and also make connections with staff and volunteers who share the booklets with them. Sczesny worked with University of Indianapolis students for over a year to formulate the questionnaire that participants would answer to complete the book. Among the questions, participants were asked about their families and interests.

Sczesny values each person and wants to celebrate important moments in their lives so she created the Bucket Wish, a fund to provide participants with a unique experience. She is most excited that her grant-writing abilities will support this effort. For example, a couple has been married for 63 years but could not celebrate their anniversary because she was battling breast cancer and he had been hospitalized many times. Sczesny happily planned their anniversary party sponsored by the Bucket Wish. Sczesny wants to “give glory to their journey in life.”

According to Sczesny this is “not a job, it is a ministry. Taking care of the person. I was called to do this. It’s not work. I love what I do.”

Interested in the program for a loved one or wish to volunteer? Would you like to donate? A Caring Place also has 2-3 driver positions open. Please contact Amy J. Sczesny at 317.466-0015 or asczesny@archindy.org.

MLK CENTER: A COMMUNITY HEART

MAELEEN HURLEY | *BTNA Board Member*

As a member of the BTNA Board, I have been coming to the MLK Center once a month for BTNA meetings since 2011. Located on the corner of 40th and Illinois streets, I have never thought of it as more than a meeting place until I noticed changes in the interior of the building and met the new Managing Director Allison Luthe. Gone is the dated décor and in its place are modern touches like the large three-foot-tall metal letters M-L-K that greet you in the entryway. These letters are a powerful graphic symbol of what the Center is for—to perpetuate the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. with the mission of “creating a meaningful impact on the lives of those we serve

through quality programs focused primarily on youth, seniors, and families.”

The MLK Center started in 1971 as the Butler-Tarkington Multi-Service Center and then was renamed the Martin Luther King Community Center ten years later. The first Executive Director was Charles Montgomery who spoke about its history and purpose at a Founders Breakfast in January to celebrate 45 years of the organization’s service to the community.

A graduate of Butler University, Allison Luthe earned her Masters of Social Work degree from IUPUI. Hired in June 2015, Luthe possesses significant experience in community organizing, social

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justice and neighborhood development needed to execute this mission. She previously worked at Central Indiana Jobs for Justice and the United Way.

It has not even been a year since she was hired and already I feel that Luthe has accomplished so much. She has brought a sense of vibrancy and energy that had been missing. Specifically she has relaunched the afterschool program, started Fall Break/Spring Breaks programs and expanded the Seniors program. She was also instrumental in creating the Neighborhood & Family Advocate Project. This project “helps you secure employment, gain education, increase income, and improve your housing situation.” For people 17 years of age or older, there are GED classes, job training and career training among the services offered. For children grades K through 8, services offered include homework help and mentoring.

Luthe is excited about partnerships with other organizations and says she gets calls every day. She is happy that the MLK Center provides meeting spaces and programming. She has partnered with nearby Meridian Street United Methodist Church so that their members staff the free mentoring program. She has also built relationships with the Midtown Arts Council and the Faith Hope and Love Community to provide art workshops from February 16 to March 15, 2016, featuring painting, sculpture, jewelry, t-

shirt screen-printing and landscape design.

Another neighborhood entity that Luthe is successfully partnering with is IPS School 43. The MLK Center provides education case management in that it takes referrals from School 43 to help students with their homework and education reinforcement. While they offer positive support to School 43 families, Luthe encourages anyone to bring their child and one of her goals is to grow youth activities with reading, public speaking and leadership development.

Another reason for Luthe’s success is her ability to meet new people, make connections and identify “champions” in the community. Luthe acknowledges that her vision for the Center cannot be executed well without the support of her staff and volunteers. She is grateful to her staff which includes Marketing & Programming Director Brooke Paddock who has been “creating a buzz” with her social media savvy. I have noticed an updated, attractive as well as informative website and Facebook page. Among other duties, volunteers serve at the front desk and help with general office work. They include

seniors and students from the International School, Brebeuf and Cathedral as well as college students.

Luthe is also grateful to the sponsors of the MLK Center including The United Way and The Indianapolis Foundation. Luthe is mindful however that the MLK Center still needs to do fundraising and so she writes grants and provides events to encourage such giving. Recently she launched the 1929 campaign with a Founders Breakfast celebrating 45 years that the MLK Center has been in

existence. This campaign honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who was born in 1929. The Center will also have its annual garden party fundraiser in June. Luthe’s goal is to raise a total of \$19,290 by June 30, 2016.

Luthe would like to welcome families to register for this year’s summer camp. Summer camp lasts for 7 weeks and runs from June 13 to July 29. Registration will be in April and can be done on-line or in person at the front desk. The cost of camp is partially subsidized by the Summer Youth Program Fund. The cost to families is \$60 per week.

To volunteer or contribute please contact Allison Luthe at 317.923.4581, by email at aluthe@mlkccindy.org, or online www.mlkccindy.org.

“Recently she launched the 1929 campaign with a Founders Breakfast celebrating 45 years that the MLK Center has been in existence. This campaign honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who was born in 1929.”

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