

Shelter celebrates grand opening of new learning center

- By Deborah Sederberg, Staff Writer / Sep 13, 2011



Katherine Cope, President of the board of Citizens Concerned for the Homeless, Judy Hanish, interim director of the Grace Learning Center, Debbie Bonds, program director of Grace Learning Center and Tom Isakson, executive director of the Sand Castle Shelter, Monday all participated in the ribbon cutting at the grand opening of the Grace Learning Center, on the grounds of the Sand Castle Shelter. Photo by Deborah Sederberg

MICHIGAN CITY — Four years ago, when Citizens Concerned for the Homeless opened its new Sandcastle Shelter at 1005 W. Eighth St., in what formerly served as the rectory for Sacred Heart Church, the CCH and then shelter director Judy Hanish began to talk about an education center.

On Monday, that goal was realized with the grand opening of the Grace Learning Center. Hanish said the center, which is open to any resident of the county, has registered its first two students.

The property on which the shelter and the learning center are located was donated by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gary at the recommendation of the Rev. James McGrogan, now-retired pastor of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception parish.

Later, members of another church, the now-closed Grace Church, donated \$90,000, the amount left in the church treasury, to the shelter and Judy Pinkston, Michigan City community development director, arranged for a Community Development Block Grant of more than \$100,000.

Hanish, who went from shelter director to interim director of the learning center, said Monday's event is a dream-come-true for everyone with CCH.

State Rep. Scott Pelath, D-Michigan City, a CCH board member, said the Sandcastle and now the Grace Learning Center helped him "to realize the reservoir of people of good will in this community."

Every night in America, Pelath said, some 500,000 people are homeless and 18.7 million homes are empty every night.

Michigan City, he said, managed to match an empty home with people in need of a home.

Everyone knows that lack of education and lack of job skills are two of the chief causes of homelessness, he noted. "You've heard the lesson that says if you give a person a fish, you feed the person for a day but if you teach a person to fish, you feed a person for a lifetime.

“That’s exactly what Grace Learning Center is about – teaching people to fish,” Pelath said.

Tom Isakson, executive director of the shelter and DeNita Ton, a founding member of CCH, also spoke at the event.

Katherine Cope, president of the CCH board, thanked everyone who contributed to the shelter and the learning center and introduced the learning center program director Debbie Bonds.