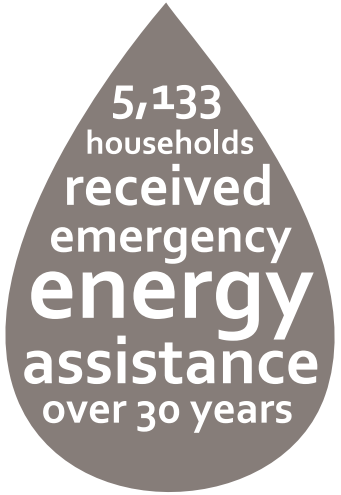
30 years of meeting needs and offering hope.



St. Vincent de Paul Middletown

What a pleasure it is to be a part of this mission we call *St. Vincent de Paul Middletown.*

And what a truly dynamic mission it is, a ministry that invokes and lives out the Beatitudes and stands as a beacon for justice. All are welcome and cared for in a manner that is responsive and respectful with every effort made to embrace and celebrate the uniqueness of each individual.

As a member of the Board of Directors for the past 6 years I have had the opportunity to witness the dedication of a staff that give honor to the spirit of St. Vincent by working with humility, zeal, mercy and self-sacrifice. They do so with inspiration and enthusiasm. I have had the pleasure to serve with others on the Board who bring care and compassion to their work and I have been moved by the commitment of the many volunteers whose gifts continue to make this ministry possible.

We are blessed with a generous community and supportive Diocese that offer heartfelt support to the work we do and those we serve. While I hope that in another 30 years the services we provide will no longer be needed, I don't think that hope is realistic. I expect that there will always be members of our community who fall through the cracks, fall on hard times, live on the margins and I expect that St. Vincent de Paul will be there to lend a hand.

BOB SPENCER
BOARD PRESIDENT

St. Vincent de Paul *Our Community*

It has been my privilege to be the Executive Director at St. Vincent de Paul Middletown for the last four years. For me this position is the perfect fit — working in the community where my family and I live, leading a faith-based agency committed to caring for people in need. I have been a student of social theory and an activist for social justice, but many years ago I understood that my primary vocation was to work more on a personal level with individual people and families to help meet their basic needs, to develop relationships and build trust, to encourage them and to love them. This decision was rooted in my personal faith in a God of grace, compassion, forgiveness and mercy — a God who has called us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Founded in 1980 as a community ministry of the Diocese of Norwich by Sisters of Mercy Pat McKeon and Caroline Beaudoin, St. Vincent de Paul Place was "the place" on Main Street in Middletown where people in need could come for a meal, groceries, clothing, shelter and financial assistance.

The core of this mission as I understand it was a Catholic Worker spirit of hospitality, a welcoming of guests to "a table" or "a place" where in the "breaking of the bread" one could escape from the burdens of failure, judgment, fear and hopelessness to be nourished by dignity and love.

The core ministries (Soup Kitchen, Amazing Grace Food Pantry, Community Assistance and Supportive Housing) have remained the same over the years and they are the essence of who we are and what we do. The Soup Kitchen is really a community dining room, a place where people gather to share a meal.

We are excited to welcome Lydia Brewster to our staff as the Assistant Director of Community Services. Lydia comes as a community organizer (she is the founder of NEAT, Middletown's North End Action Team) and is well-known in the neighborhood. Since the Soup Kitchen is not just another restaurant on Main Street for the poor but a place of hospitality, Lydia's role is primarily to welcome our guests — to meet them, hear their stories, and help to make connections to services, community resources, housing and employment, social activities and educational opportunities.

St. Vincent de Paul Middletown has a 30-year history of meeting needs and offering hope that has paralleled my own personal and professional development.

I always say that St. Vincent de Paul Middletown is able to do great work because we have great community partners. Most of our income comes from individuals, small businesses, schools, faith communities and many committed people and groups right here in the greater Middletown area. I hope that each of you can share in our joy that we have been able to love our neighbors in need for many years and share our commitment to do so for many more years. May God bless you all.

RON KROM
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Some come, eat quickly and leave; others stay like a family around the dining table for hours after the meal to enjoy good conversation and friendships. Some come because they are hungry and have very limited resources for buying or preparing their own meals; others come because they live alone and they enjoy the company of their friends and meeting new people.

This past year has been particularly exciting at the Amazing Grace Food Pantry. After many years of searching for a new home, we finally bought a building and renovated it into the best food pantry in Connecticut! (See article, p. 12) The new facility is spacious, cheerful, warm and welcoming, and that spirit and tone is enhanced by the care and love shown by the staff and volunteers under the guidance and direction of Kathleen Kelly. The renovation was really a testament to the community commitment to sharing food. We logged more than 2,000 hours of volunteer labor in just two months!

Now we are able to distribute groceries to approximately 800 households each month — enough to make more than 200,000 meals a year!

Community Assistance continues to be a vital service to folks facing economic hardships in their homes and families. We are blessed to be able to assist almost 400 households each year with rental assistance, security deposits, utility bills and fuel oil, transportation, identification, medical bills and medications, clothing and more.

We have many partners — 26 local faith communities, Operation Fuel, the Middlesex Female Charitable Society, the Middlesex County Coalition on Housing & Homelessness and the Jones Fund. Our work is that of a "gatekeeper" — we determine need and eligibility and serve as the fiduciary for the almost $100,000 annually that is donated by our partners and simply passes through our "gate" to the folks who need it. Valarie Smith is the saintly woman who spends her days listening to the stories of people in crises. As she faces their tears, frustration and hopelessness, Valarie offers empathy, compassion and hope, and is often able to provide some financial assistance to meet their need in the moment.

Many of you may not know how much of a commitment we've made to Supportive Housing. In fact, Liberty Commons, a 40-unit apartment building next to the Soup Kitchen, is Connecticut's first supportive housing project (founded in 1995). St. Vincent de Paul staff, under the leadership of Terry Carbone, provides support services to adults with mental illness, disabilities and/or who struggle with addictions.





In 2008, we also received federal and state contracts to expand our supportive housing to another 16 individuals living in subsidized apartments out in the community. These grants have enabled us to target the chronically homeless in a *Housing First* model — a model where folks with histories of psychiatric illness and substance abuse who have also been homeless for many years are given apartments. Housing Case Managers Raul Acevedo and Dolores Ereshena provide the intensive support services necessary to help them be successful in housing for perhaps the first time in their lives. Our experience, and the experiences of other programs nationally, demonstrate that these individuals can be housed and often begin to improve the quality of their lives from the security and stability of having an apartment of their own. By June 2011, we will be providing support services to 62 individuals in our housing program; more than 90% have remained housed for at least two years and some for many more years.

One of the more important services that we provide to assist people with their housing aid is to become a representative payee for folks.

We are one of the few options in Middletown for people who have histories of evictions and homelessness. The concept is simple — we receive the Social Security checks or other income and we pay the housing-related bills (rent and utilities). The rest of the month's income is available to the individual to spend as they choose. We now have accounts for 31 individuals (and requests for many more) and to date no one has lost their apartment due to non-payment of rent.

As you can see, our programs, services and ministries continue to address the basic needs of many people in our community. This past year the Board of Directors at "St. Vincent de Paul Place" struggled to shed the image that we are only a Soup Kitchen. We realized that our name and logo (the front of the Soup Kitchen) contributed to the agency's identification as anchored to a "place" on Main Street. As long as we continued to focus attention on the Soup Kitchen, we would be just the Soup Kitchen. As a result, we partnered with Noemi Kearns and her staff at How 2 Design to help us rethink our name, logo and tagline.

We are excited to present the agency as St. Vincent de Paul Middletown with a fresh abstract design as our logo and the tagline "Meeting Needs, Offering Hope."

We have not written newsletters, annual reports or solicited donations in many years. In this 30th Anniversary Year, we would like to give you the opportunity to celebrate with us — to celebrate our many programs, to celebrate all of the lives we've touched as we've welcomed them with hospitality and ministered and cared for their needs, to celebrate our new facility for the Amazing Grace Food Pantry, to celebrate new housing for the chronically homeless, to celebrate our new name and logo, and to join with us in meeting needs and offering hope. You can celebrate with us by making an extra donation at this time and we would be most grateful. You can also celebrate by sharing with us your email address so that we can keep in touch more regularly through an e-newsletter about all that is happening. So please send back the enclosed envelope whether you are able to donate at this time or not.

— Ron Krom





30 Years *Our History*

1980 **Sr. Patricia McKeon and Sr. Carol Beaudoin (Sisters of Mercy) open St. Vincent de Paul Place in Middletown as a community ministry of the Diocese of Norwich.** Building at 617 Main Street is purchased and renovated. First meal is served at the Soup Kitchen on November 24.

1981 **Bishop Reilly celebrates mass at the official dedication.** Community discussions begin about the need for an emergency shelter and the Middletown Emergency Shelter Coalition is formed.

1982 **Neighborhood fire at 634 Main Street leaves 40 people homeless;** temporary shelter given at Dutton Hall on the Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH) campus.

1983 **Soup Kitchen dining room opens 24 hrs/day for the homeless.** $90,000 raised to renovate the second and third floor at St. Vincent de Paul Place to open an emergency shelter. First shelter guests admitted in December.

1984 **Fire at St. Vincent de Paul Place** — meals moved to Holy Trinity Episcopal Church and shelter guests moved to Salvation Army temporarily.

1988 **Fred Evans joins staff as co-Executive Director. St. Vincent de Paul and local service agencies begin discussions about supportive housing.** "Shelters are not the answer to homelessness. Housing is." (Sr. Patricia McKeon)

1991 **St. Vincent de Paul shelter closes.** Middletown's adult shelter moves to the CVH campus.

1996 **Liberty Commons opens as the first supportive housing project in CT.** St. Vincent de Paul receives contract to provide support services to 40 tenants from the Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services.

1999 **Soup Kitchen dining room is remodeled and dedicated to Sr. Carol Beaudoin.** St. Vincent de Paul and local service agencies begin discussion about partnership to form a community food pantry.

2000 **Area faith communities join with St. Vincent de Paul to form the Community Assistance Program** — a discretionary fund to help people in need or in crisis. St. Vincent de Paul provides staffing and serves as "gatekeeper" for this program.

2002 **Amazing Grace Food Pantry opens on Washington Street** as a community partnership with St. Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Middlesex Red Cross and the United Way.

2003 **Amazing Grace Food Pantry moves to 139 Main Street Extension.** St. Vincent de Paul assumes fiduciary and management responsibilities for the initiative.

2005 **St. Vincent de Paul Place celebrates 25th Anniversary.**

2007 **Ron Krom is hired to replace Peter Harding as Executive Director.**

2008 **St. Vincent de Paul is awarded 15 units of permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless.** St. Vincent de Paul staff is involved in the implementation of the Middlesex County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness.

2010 **30th Anniversary!** ***St. Vincent de Paul Middletown — Meeting Needs, Offering Hope*** is adopted as new name and tagline. Purchase and renovation of 16 Stack Street for the Amazing Grace Food Pantry — pantry opens at new location on November 1. Ecumenical liturgy for anniversary year and pantry grand opening.

Amanda Carrier *Our Chef*

WRITTEN BY TANJA MORIARTY

Our five-foot-two cheerful cook balances on a chair as she writes the menu of the day on the chalkboard. 'Sicilian style pasta, Grandma's green beans, apple crisp surprise.'

"You have to spice it up a bit," Amanda (Mandy) Carrier, smiles with her dark brown eyes shining. "People are more interested if you say more than just pasta and green beans. They come in and say, 'Oh, Grandma's green beans, I'll have some of those.'"

Mandy brings her passion and inventiveness to the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen adding spices and secret ingredients to tasty gumbos and turning plain potatoes into delectable dishes for the 150 or so guests who eat in our dining room each day.

"I really enjoy working here," Mandy smiles. "It's different every day." She worked in a food chain restaurant after culinary training and had little opportunity to create. "Here, I try to have a menu, but in the growing season it can change depending on what walks through the door. I have to dig out the cookbooks."

Last summer, after a farmer brought a car load of zucchini three days in a row, Mandy rose to the challenge and didn't let any of it go to waste. "We had sautéed zucchini, stuffed zucchini, zucchini in lasagna, and apple crisp with zucchini!"

Donned in her chef's uniform and baker's cap, the twenty-five-year-old with multiple-pierced earlobes is a former Girl Scout, college and culinary school graduate, snow skier ... and a candidate for the sisterhood.

Seasoning for the Sisterhood

How long has this vivacious, young woman known she was destined for the sisterhood? "There was no pinpoint in time when I decided," she said, as a matter of fact. "I grew into it, really, over the past six or seven years."

Raised in Granby, Connecticut by Catholic parents, Mandy attended Northwest Catholic High School. "We went to mass regularly and my father was a deacon."

After high school, Mandy attended the University of Dayton in Ohio. "I first studied to be an engineer, and then began thinking of religious studies." She attended a student-run group on campus that held praise and worship services.

"I joined a discerning group for people my age. When I was a freshman, I called my sister and said, "What do you think Mom and Dad would say if I became a nun?" They wanted grandkids. My sister said, "Just tell them. Rip the band-aid off." My father was happy, my mother questioned me a lot."

Mandy began systematically researching various orders around the country she found online and through packets mailed to her.

"I had a two page list and crossed orders off (as they didn't apply). Some were only for teaching, some for only healthcare. Some were cloistered (single-mission), and some were monastic (a lot more structured in their daily life). I was looking for more apostolic or working out in the world, a mixture of contemplation and action."

During junior and senior year at college, Mandy worked in the catering department at the school. In her senior year, she decided she wanted to go to a culinary school. Around this time, she found the Sisters of Mercy online and in *Vision Magazine.* "They are apostolic with more choices. They operate on mutual discernment. They don't just tell you what to do or where to go, but offer you opportunities. It felt right." she said.

Mandy connected with Sister Elaine Deasy, a vocational minister at the Sisters of Mercy in West Hartford, Connecticut, and then enrolled in culinary school at Manchester Community College. She became a candidate ("not a postulate, that's an old term") for the Sisters of Mercy, and mentee of Sister Elaine.

Sister Elaine, a former SVD Board member, introduced Mandy to our kitchen as an intern while she was finishing up her culinary program in May 2009.

"I knew immediately Mandy would be a good fit," explained Sister Elaine. "She has a wonderful sense of presence, loves the culinary arts and wants to serve." The Sisters of Mercy take a vow of service to the poor, the sick and uneducated. "With her natural skills, her personality and enthusiasm and really strong work ethic—she has maturity beyond her years. We are very blessed to have her among us."

Mandy became a member of the staff in May 2010. She moved into a family-style house with two older sisters in August where she will live until she goes to Texas in 2012 for her novitiate (intensive study, serious discernment, and ministry work).

In the meantime, Mandy will continue cooking and working with people who come to the kitchen for court-mandated community service at St. Vincent de Paul.

"I am new to this ministry. I don't have a background in Human Services, but I am kind of growing into it. People talk to me about their lives and ask me about mine. I definitely have a feeling I have been called here."





Lydia Brewster *Our Organizer*

WRITTEN BY LYDIA BREWSTER,
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES

"Grandma's new restaurant" as three-year-old Emily Kreger recently referred to the site of my new position at the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen had a nice ring to it and two months into my new position in the Soup Kitchen has confirmed that grassroots work is where I belong. It is indeed a plus that this exciting mecca sits in my favorite neighborhood on the planet! Grandma is very happy to be home in the North End around the table with the people in our city who can most use a hot meal and friendly conversation.

Our Soup Kitchen staff, headed by our chef Amanda Carrier, manages to prepare daily feasts that bring up to 150 people to the table for breakfast and lunch. Ernie Gully, Debbie Maddox, Carmela O'Brien, and our newest Dining Room host Mika Taliaferro run a tight ship and manage to exude warmth, humor, discipline, and good judgment even as daily challenges occur among our diverse population of guests. Their efforts to maintain our equipment, keep our work and dining areas clean, and supervise our volunteers require skill and patience and I am in awe of their expertise.

We feed people well. Can we do more? I am stunned by the numbers of guests who are homeless. The statistics on homelessness provide us with a snapshot but they do not accurately reflect the numbers of men, women, and families who are completely without shelter, living outside, in emergency shelter, or day-to-day with a friend. Many of the homeless have been so for years, living by their own resourcefulness on the edge of disaster. Our dining room is the common denominator they share, so it makes sense to invite other service providers to expand their outreach to our dining room. Last week Middletown Adult Education, United Labor Agency, and River Valley Services came to introduce their services to our guests. The Community Health Center, KUHN Employment, the Social Security Administration and others are expected to attend monthly Services Seminars as well. I have joined with the Homeless Outreach Team, headed by River Valley Services and offered the Soup Kitchen as an outreach laboratory to expand services to our neediest residents.

The chess boards are becoming popular with Fred from The Buttonwood Tree encouraging chess players who haven't played for years to polish their skills. Game tournaments and movie nights are in the planning stages along with some beautification efforts that began with replacement of the dingy plastic window in our front door with glass donated by Middletown Plate Glass. Volunteer Peter Keast has become the Kitchen's resident handyman — he has replaced our glass and constructed a new mounting rack for kitchen utensils; he's now plotting with me on how to add some green touches to our exterior.

The harsh winter forced the City's Homeless Commission to make some tough decisions to prevent potential tragedy. SVD provided a Warming Center from January through mid-March, opening the dining room from 9 PM to 6:30 AM for warmth and hot drinks and movies. The numbers of participants exceeded our expectations, confirming that the numbers of homeless are many. The challenge now is to use our knowledge to plan effectively and advocate for permanent solutions more aggressively.

Soup Stories *Our Guests*

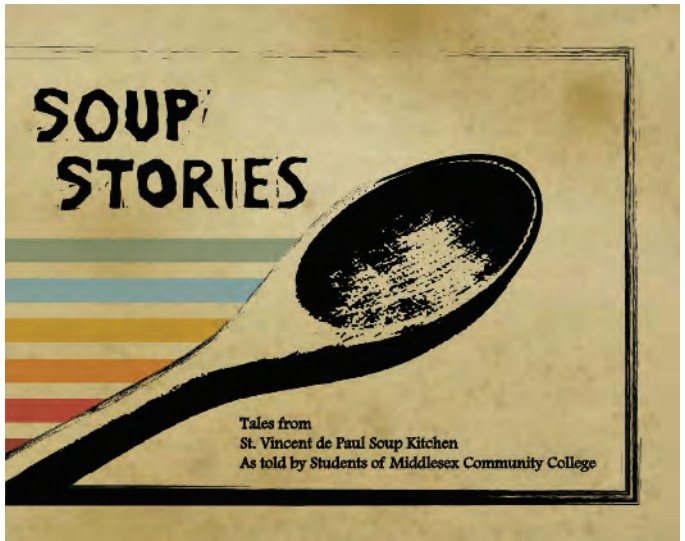
This little booklet tells the personal stories of valued members of our community. It represents a culmination of many months of heartfelt and collaborative work, involving the students, staff, and faculty of Middlesex Community College and the support of the Executive Director and Board of St. Vincent de Paul Middletown.

As with most good works, this project began with an idea, or maybe even a dream, which was sparked during some self-reflection following a Board meeting at St. Vincent de Paul. At this particular Board meeting, Ron Krom shared some writing that a volunteer had composed after a summer of working in the soup kitchen.

The student's reflections brought to life the individuals who frequent the soup kitchen and gave us reason to celebrate the mission and spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. These reflections told us that more could be shared with the community about the wealth found within the stories of those who dine at the soup kitchen.

One of the things that we know is that "the poor" are not a homogenous group of people who fit nicely into stereotypical categories, no matter what our political, social or theological position may be. To provide services to the poor and needy is really a ministry of hospitality — an opportunity to welcome people into our midst and to celebrate their uniqueness, their gifts and talents, their joys and sufferings.

St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen is really a community dining room where people gather to share meals with their neighbors. Soup Stories has provided an opportunity for some of the guests to share their stories and images with some of you who have never come to the Soup Kitchen. It has also given them a chance to remember their lives and to feel a sense of pride in who they are.



Judith Felton
Professor of Human Services and Psychology
Coordinator: Human Services Program
Middlesex Community College

Ron Krom
Executive Director
St. Vincent de Paul Middletown

Amazing Grace *Our Food Pantry*

A significant donation bequest from the trust of Loretta Ingersoll in the fall of 2007 led to the purchase of a 6,240 square-foot food pantry on September 1, 2011. With the help of many, we moved into the former Suburban Stationers building at 16 Stack Street and opened on November 1st.

"The project has actually been in the works for years," said Kathleen Kelly, the pantry Coordinator. "We have needed a larger pantry for a long time," she added. In 2009, we hit an all-time high serving 9,456 households, or 803 households per month. In these difficult economic times, the number of households served continues to steadily climb.

The new facility underwent extensive renovations including plumbing, heating and air conditioning, windows, ceiling tiles, carpeting and flooring, electrical and IT wiring, and general carpentry to prepare for its official opening. Joe Fazzino volunteered his time to lead the project.

Hundreds of people donated thousands of hours of their time to help paint walls, pack up goods and equipment, move and unload things, and set up furniture and shelving in the new pantry.

Christie Batchelder supervised the volunteer projects and kept things moving. Dozens of volunteers gathered October 30–31 to move the contents of the pantry from the old location on East Main Street to 16 Stack Street in the North End. Those volunteers included members from several congregations in the area, Wesleyan, Rotary Club, Americare, United Technologies, the St. Vincent de Paul Soup Kitchen and Amazing Grace Pantry, the Boy Scouts, and many individuals who care deeply about this program.

An open house at the pantry Nov. 27 included an Ecumenical Celebration and a Liturgy of Thanksgiving with Norwich Bishop Michael R. Cote, and leaders of many other faith congregations that have supported the Soup Kitchen and Amazing Grace through the years.

On Thursday, December 9 an open house was held for businesses, city officials, civic groups, contractors, volunteers and people who have been supportive of Amazing Grace with donations of food and money over the years. Middletown Mayor Sebastian Giuliano cut the ribbon at the event.

The new Amazing Grace Food Pantry now features a spacious shopping area, large warehouse section, large freezer/refrigeration units, waiting room, three offices, a volunteer break room, reception area and delivery entrance.

It also has a parking lot with 24 more parking spaces than the old building and is conveniently located on the bus line providing easy access to local residents. The color scheme, designed by Pam Hartz Miller, is bright and cheerful. The new facility is welcoming to everyone — staff, volunteers, shoppers, and food donors. Come visit us if you haven't already!


BEEF
VEGETAR
Nutrition Facts
Campbell's

Terry Carbone *Our Caregiver*

WRITTEN BY TANJA MORIARTY

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2010, the average number of years a person had been with their current employer was 4.4 years. Our Terry Carbone beats the national average six times having gone literally from cook and bottle washer to Assistant Director for Housing Services in the past twenty-five years.

"A lot has changed," said St. Vincent de Paul veteran Terry. "People have come and gone but the mission has stayed the same — to serve our community."

Besides staying true to the mission, Terry credits St. Vincent de Paul leaders for making her longevity with the mission a no-brainer. "I have had the good fortune to work with all of the directors (Sr. Pat McKeon, Sr. Carol Beaudoin, Fred Evans, Peter Harding and now Ron Krom) each of whom has shaped the agency into what we are today. What started out as a mission to feed and clothe the homeless in the area has evolved into a community food pantry, two supportive housing programs, community outreach and a soup kitchen. Each believed in the mission of St. Vincent de Paul and sought ways to meet the ever-changing needs of the underserved."

Terry's story

Terry came on the scene in 1986 with a social work degree from St. Joseph's College. She also had two years experience serving the poor and homeless through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps working in Schenectady, NY at a halfway house and then in Baltimore, MD at a drop-in homeless center.

Terry started in the kitchen cooking meals a couple of days a week, preparing the dining room and interacting with the guests. By 1988, she morphed into an outreach worker on the homeless outreach team and helped guests transition from the shelter into housing and treatment programs.

She has also served on various committees exploring supportive housing needs in the Middletown community. In 1996, when Liberty Commons, a rehabilitated 1920s hotel opened as premier supportive housing complex for forty men and women who have a history of homelessness, mental, physical, and addiction disabilities, Terry became the coordinator.

Terry also attributes her choice to stay on-board to the dedication of our community supporters. "We have had a tremendous donor base who believed in the work. We are able to do what we do, not just because there are 18 employees now at St. Vincent de Paul, but because of the hundreds of volunteers and unnamed champions whose time, talents and resources allow us to do what we do."

So what does Terry do?

Terry is part of a supportive housing team and leader of Liberty Commons case managers Diane Cipollini-Mayo and David Downs who provide supportive services to forty residents with mental illness and addictions. They manage tenants money, medical appointments, and connect them with social services.

Terry also supports Next Steps/HUD case managers Raul Acevedo and Dolores Ereshena who provide services to 22 formerly chronically homeless individuals now living in their own apartments.

Liberty Commons looks a lot like a college dormitory with a check-in window in the lobby, long hallways and efficiency apartments. There's a community TV room, a pool table room with Friday billiard tournaments, a piano and a computer desk lab in the lobby.

"I've met great people along the way who have shared their lives and their story," she said. "People establish roots and a permanent residence here. This has allowed some to pursue educational and employment goals."

"We try to establish a sense of community," Terry said. "There is a core of people who look out for one another. They tell us if they haven't seen someone in a while."

A tenant council meets regularly to come up with recreational ideas such as bingo or baking or to bring up building issues. They also have a weekly "Coffee and", monthly holiday-themed meals and potluck suppers, and outdoor activities.

The biggest change over the past 25 years?

"Hunger issues are still prevalent in our community with record numbers using the food pantry and coming to the soup kitchen, but the focus in recent years has been on establishing supportive housing. That has been a significant step in meeting the needs of the homeless." Terry attributes this positive change to the longevity of the mission. "There seems to be more community involvement due to the work of the directors to educate the community and become good neighbors."

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2010–2011

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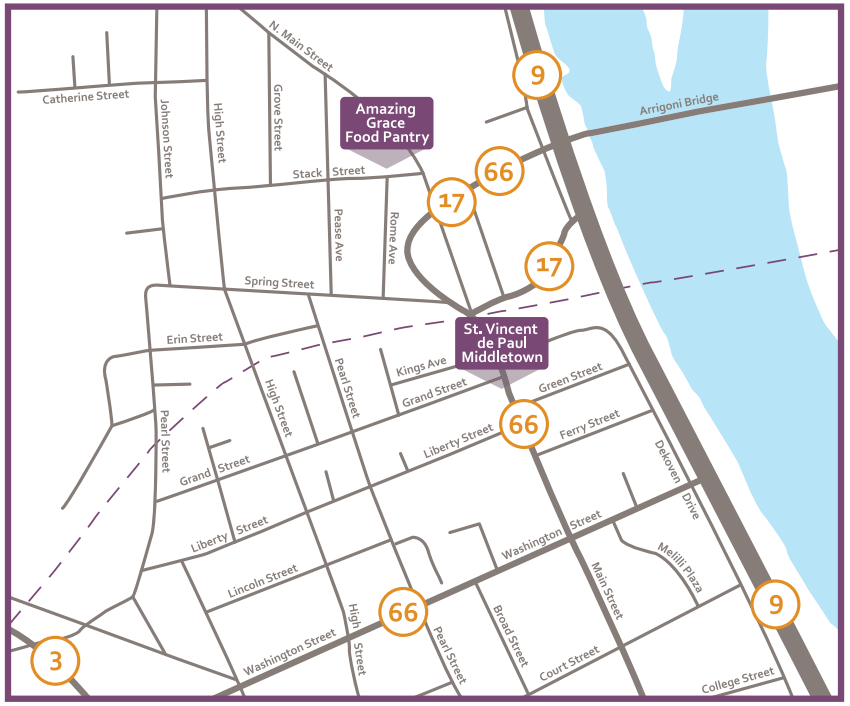

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