



Calumet Township Tempo

Official publication of Calumet Township, Lake County, Indiana
Mary Elgin, Trustee Main Office: 610 Connecticut Street, Gary, Indiana 46402 219/880-4000 Summer, 2009



A year ago Calumet Township employees were thrilled to have moved into the new main office complex at 610 Connecticut Street, Gary. Although the move was only a block from the old digs all agreed their new workplace was a vast improvement over the old.

A year later a group of employees convinced Trustee Mary Elgin to mark the event with a first anniversary celebration.

The celebration was held Friday, May 29. It included welcoming remarks from IS&T Deputy Steven Hunter, an invocation from the Rev. (Continued on Page 6)



Anniversary celebrants: Rev. Alfred Johnson, Calumet Township Board Chairman Alex Cherry, Rev. Norman Hairston, Trustee Mary Elgin, Images of Hope CEO Ella Bush, Rev. Dwight Gardner.

Board Makes Routine Cash Transfers



Smooth sailing ... for a change: Trustee, third from left, and board members Ron Matlock and Chairman Alex Cherry, fifth and sixth from left, at meeting.

The Calumet Township Board met at the request of Trustee Mary Elgin on Friday, April 24 and approved routine transfers of amounts to and from the Rainy Day Fund to ensure sufficient operating funds tiding the township through the rest of the year.

“I thank the board for approving the transfers,” said Trustee Mary Elgin. “The transfers were necessary because of lagging property tax collections by the county, leading to late funding from the county to us.”

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MISSION STATEMENT

Calumet Township is committed to providing professional, compassionate service to help residents in time of dire economic emergency. The township will utilize social services, job training and employment assistance to help clients in the transition from societal dependence to economic independence.

TOWNSHIP BOARD

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Clorius Lay

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From me to you

Mary Elgin, Trustee

Some Springtime thoughts

Summer is generally the time of year we think of vacations, kicking back and relaxing with a book, having picnics, going to the movies or just spending quality time with family and friends. Cool, huh?

Yet, to others, summer is the time of contemplating putting together viable government budgets, thinking of tax collection shortfalls, wrestling with myriad problems caused by our shaky economy. Think about that next time you are out having fun and casually lambasting leaders you think aren't "on the job". Actually they generally are, but out of sight.

Working beyond the designated workday is generally called "overtime". And that is what the Indiana General Assembly had to do this year as it went into a "special session" to work out kinks in the state budget, soothe battered egos and work out what Donald Trump famously called the art of the deal.

Once again, township elimination was brought up but once again, thank goodness, it was defeated. But that only means we live to fight another day. The issue will surely be back. So far, kudos to all those who helped hold the anti-township forces at bay. It boggles my mind that Gov. Daniels and his cohorts dismiss the problems created at the Family and Social Services Administration ever since the state awarded IBM \$1.16 billion to run it. The complaints from clients about the mess IBM has created are never ending. Yet the problems could have been avoided if either the Indiana Township Association or the United Township Association had been consulted.

Trustees in the large urban townships are familiar with most of what the FSSA does. As a matter of fact, we assist in elements of their work. Why shouldn't our expertise be utilized, most likely at a lower cost than that paid IBM, to get the job done?

It's been a year since we moved into our new main office. Feedback from staff and the public has been overwhelmingly positive. At the behest of the staff we had a little ceremony to celebrate the first anniversary. It was superb, especially the ice cream social featuring *donated* ice cream and soda.

Finally, the environmental program mentioned on Page 8 is more than merely collecting recyclable paper products. It's about showing our genuine concern for a planetary problem, plus building team spirit and cooperation among employees. Let's all pitch in and do our part to show Mother Nature we are good stewards of Earth.

“So, this is what you do.”

Anticipation and excitement in their eyes, 18 children accompanied their parents or grandparents to work at the Calumet Township main office on April 23, National Take Our Daughters & Sons to Work Day. Ranging in age from eight to 18, the youngsters spent the day learning what their parents or grandparents do at the township, while getting a firsthand look at the working world.

They were greeted by Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin who had breakfast with them. In welcoming them she explained the importance of township services and the role the township plays in the lives of the needy. She stressed that spending the day with their parents would show the real world of work as opposed to that portrayed on certain “reality” television programs.

Following a brief introduction to some safety precautions, the youngsters were given a guided tour of the premises by employees Steven Hunter, Adina Williams and Michelle Wilson.

“The kids were extremely well behaved,” said Williams, who had brought her daughter Aubree.

After spending time throughout the day at their guardian’s workplace the youngsters enjoyed a communal lunch.

Among the youngsters were Taylor Rogers-Powell, granddaughter of finance department supervisor Barbara Smith and Cylk. J. Joseph, son of claims processing clerk Pamela Joseph.

Rogers-Powell, a freshman at Roosevelt High School in Gary, is looking forward to attending college to study law enforcement. “I’m glad my grandmother invited me to see what she does at work,” said Rogers. “It’s nice to know her work involves helping people, especially those in need.”

Joseph, a Bowman High School junior hoping to pursue a sports



Taylor Rogers-Powell observes grandmother Barbara Smith crunching numbers.

management career, expressed similar sentiments. “I knew it was going to be interesting when my mom said I had to look very professional to go to her office,” he said with a laugh. “The very professional atmosphere throughout the building indicated serious work was being done. My casual observation showed my mom’s fellow workers truly care about their work and the folks they help. I hope I have the same attitude when I’m working too.”

According to Trustee Elgin, Take Our Daughters & Sons to Work Day originated 17 years ago as a way to introduce youngsters to what their parents do at work “It also enables them to appreciate their parents or guardians even more, and to present possibilities for careers to the youngsters. I’m always gratified at how excited the youngsters are to see what their parents and others do at the township,” she said



Cylk Joseph finds the work his mother, Pamela Joseph, does interesting.



Teresa Hamblin and son Jeremiah Smith.



Kids and guardians having a fun lunch.

Cynthia Holman-Upshaw & General Assistance Staff

Committed to Clients



Big day at the office: Holman-Upshaw discussing assignments with supervisors (from left) Shirley Payne, Vanessa Cook, Rose Curtis, Pettice Jackson, Marsha Moore, LaNita Nickson and Sharon Leonard.

“Each day brings a new challenge. But I view each challenge as a testing of our commitment to what we do. And that is providing top-notch service to those in need,” explained Cynthia Holman-Upshaw, Calumet Township general assistance deputy. “That is something Trustee Mary Elgin has instilled in all deputies and we, in turn, have inculcated in our staff.” It shows.

In 2008 the township screened 36,443 requests for township assistance, of which 9,572 from 4,663 households qualified to receive help. As townships go, that’s a lot of work.

According to Holman-Upshaw, it’s not just about applicants showing up. It’s about assigning staff to interview each applicant to make sure they meet township eligibility guidelines.

It’s about conducting thorough background checks of any form of income, including alimony, unemployment compensation, income tax refund, interest from savings

accounts, or even financial assistance from family and friends.

The staff handling general assistance can tell what kind of day it’s going to be as soon as they come to work.

“Even though they’re not admitted until 7:30 a.m., when I arrive at 7:45, and see a crowded waiting room plus a line outside, I know it’s going to be hectic,” said supervisor Lanita Nickson.

That is because about 150 clients utilize the main office daily, with as many as 180 at other times. That means the 12 intake cubicles used for interviews are abuzz all day.

During the course of a typical day certain stressed out clients might become less than polite with an intake clerk trying to help them and have to be referred to a supervisor to be placated.

“That’s not an easy situation,” said Marsha Moore. “First of all, we have a highly trained staff. And when I say highly trained, I mean they’ve even

undergone sensitivity training, so more often than not the client is wrong but that itself has to be handled delicately. Luckily, we’re trained to handle such situations and it usually works out okay.”

Sometimes there are unruly kids toted by adoring or clueless mothers who have to be reminded the township office is not a playground.

There are also men who swagger in and object to the no headdress policy (a safety precaution).

“They really have to be handled delicately but with a no-nonsense firmness,” said Holman-Upshaw. “However, I’m always relieved we have a great security team to back us up,” she finished with a laugh.

All in all, however, Holman-Upshaw and her staff cope quite well, even on the tough days.

“The trick is to remain unruffled, to remain professional and always show respect to each client,” she said.

The Goal is to Help

There are many organizations and agencies that assist the needy. In Indiana, as in many other states, the local government entity directly responsible for emergency poor relief is the township trustee's office.

The Calumet Township Trustee provides such assistance to eligible individuals. In 2008 that amounted to 9,572 needy individuals who received over \$6, 870,000 in housing, utilities, health care, burial and food assistance.

The office is administered by Trustee Mary Elgin, who is in her second four-year term; with day-to-day operations overseen by Chief Deputy Donna Coleman-Frazier.

The main office, located at 610 Connecticut Street, Gary, operates weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. New or reapplying applicants are required to attend an orientation session.

Calumet Township eligibility standards are based on need as defined by state and federal laws. Once an application has been filed and a thorough investigation of the applicant conducted to determine eligibility, the trustee has broad discretion to provide basic assistance. By law, all applications are approved or denied within 72 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. Applications are subject to recertification every 180 days.

Eligibility is determined by the difference between township financial guidelines and the total household income, assets and resources for the previous month. Assets and resources include any income, tax refund, alimony, child support, lottery winnings, education grants and financial gifts from family and friends.

The township evaluates a client's income and expenses monthly to determine continuing eligibility. Establishing eligibility requires clients to provide expenditure receipts for 80 percent of all income received by the household. Only receipts for basic living expenses are accepted. Expenditures for items considered nonessential to basic living are not accepted in seeking to qualify for township assistance.

An applicant may be denied assistance if certain expenditures are categorized as wasted resources.

Once eligibility is determined service is granted.

Investigation Necessary

In order to protect taxpayers, township assistance applicants are required to undergo investigation of their eligibility to receive assistance and compliance with township policies and procedures.

Investigators visit applicants' homes to verify residency. They also conduct building inspections to ensure rental properties meet HUD guidelines

and city building codes. If the property is in deplorable condition it will not be approved for rent and, for their safety and health, the client will be required to seek other habitable living space.

Investigators also conduct background checks and fraudulent claims, which has resulted in reimbursement of tens of thousands of dollars to the township.

A System That *WORKS*



Rose Curtis, general assistance assistant deputy, explaining the system.

To a casual observer, the line outside the Calumet Township Trustee Office might seem unmanageable. That's because clients sometimes start lining up outside the main office from as

early as 6:00 a.m. Once the guard opens the door at 7:30, the operation flows smoothly. They pass through a metal detector, are assigned a number and asked for certain information and proceed to the waiting room.

First timers are given an application slip with instructions as to what personal documentation is required to receive service.

Those who are township clients must present verifiable identification, state the number of people in their household, reveal any income and the assistance being requested. That information generates a profile which is sent via computer to the Quality Control Department where a verification slip is printed. At this stage the paperwork becomes a "case" and is prepared for service investigation.

At 8:00 a.m., half an hour after the first person was allowed in, there are usually 20 cases ready to be processed.

The clients are called by intercom and make their way across the lobby to be interviewed in depth by a service investigator. Once the service investigation is through, the case goes to a supervisor for approval. If everything is in order the case goes to the Order Writing Department.

While the paperwork is in order writing, the client goes to the Job Search Works Department to be screened for eligibility to perform some sort of community service, if able, for receipt of assistance. The screening is important. It identifies whether the client is constrained by physical limitation, household responsibility such as caring for young children or a disabled household member or other factor precluding performing community activity.

Those who are able bodied are required to perform community service, accept job training or enroll in certain educational programs leading to employability.

Once the person is through at job search works, they then go to the Order Writing Department to sign for any purchase order for which they qualify. At that point they become clients of the township.

First Anniversary

(Continued from Page 1)



So nice to be here: Audience listening to celebratory proceedings.

Alfred Johnson of St. Timothy Community Church, who said township government is the best form of local government serving people at the lowest end of the spectrum.

Vendor claims processor Katie Kendrick, well known for stirring gospel singing, delivered a resounding Star Spangled Banner even while overcome with emotion.

A cross-section of township staff, expressed their pleasure at working in their new, modern, environmentally safe surroundings.

Chuck Winer, whose Winfo data Systems provides IS&T services to the township, praised the trustee's vision in acquiring the building and renovating it into a first-class office complex.

"Let no one forget the township is an invaluable institution," said Winer. "But this township, under the leadership of Trustee Elgin, stands out for the level of service it provides, plus for the positive, humane manner in which it is provided.

"I remember this building when the feds left. I was concerned that it would be vandalized. Even though that did not happen, its rebirth is like the legendary Phoenix rising from the ashes. It's been given new life to provide services that sustain and move the less fortunate among us forward."

Of the speakers, perhaps most moving of all was township client Gayle Alford who didn't dwell on large themes or visionary goals but talked sincerely about the small things that have made such a difference to clients.

"Trustee, speaking for the clients who are hesitant to do so, I say a big "thank you" for bringing us into this beautiful place," Alford said. "We're getting the same great service. But we sure appreciate little things like the

vending machines and the snack area.

"The bathrooms are so spacious and clean. The flowers outside are so well kept. The big screen television provides a welcome diversion while we're in the waiting room. Plus we have an elevator! Those are the things that make it so pleasant. Thank you."

Catherine Spann from Images of Hope presented Elgin with a bouquet in appreciation of her hard work.

Elgin was low-keyed in her remarks, stressing the celebration was not about her accomplishments, but about what the building means to employees and clients.

"We've finally fully settled into the building. I've heard so many positive things about this building that prove the move was worth it," Said Elgin.

"Nowadays, with our short attention span it is easy to forget some things and just move on to others. But our maintenance staff doesn't have a short attention span. They have done great work in keeping everything spic and span. It is a pleasure being in this building.

But it isn't just about the looks of the place. This building has allowed us to consolidate services in one spot, thereby saving a ton of money by closing down our south side office. In doing so we saved on the lease, utilities and rampant repairs that were always necessary there. That means we've saved taxpayer dollars that now go towards services to clients.

I thank the staff, clients, vendors and taxpayers who are the beneficiaries of this move. We're going to be here awhile, so it's great that we're making the move such a positive thing."

An average of 150 clients from throughout the township are provided service at the building daily.



Katie Kendricks singing National Anthem.



Mattie Thirkield speaking on behalf of clients.



Chuck Winer praises Elgin.



Catherine Spann lauds building.

Rev. Dwight Gardner invokes blessings.



Calumet Township Receives Stimulus Cash

The federal government's bold bid to prop up the nation's ailing economy is resulting in financial assistance to countless local governments. Not wishing to be left out, Calumet Township has secured \$900,000 in American Recovery & Reconstruction Act funds from a \$2.9 million stimulus grant to Lake County.

Once Township Trustee Mary Elgin was aware the county had secured the grant, she contacted Lake County Commissioner Roosevelt Allen, Jr., formerly a member of the township board, and enquired about the process to apply for a portion of the funds.

Following his advice, the township submitted its application, drafted by Carolyn Jordan, and the county commissioners approved the funds on June 18.

The money will be used to enhance energy efficiency at the main office located at 610 Connecticut Street, Gary.

Plans are to replace the building's 47 standard windows, which date back to its construction in 1964, with super energy efficient, modern ones. All external doors will also be changed.

Trustee Mary Elgin said a study of energy losses due to the building's antiquated windows shows replacing them will result in a 25 percent lower utility bill.

"That's quite a saving by any measure. Taxpayers and our clients are the ultimate beneficiaries" Elgin said.

EMS Unit Feted



Outstanding dedication to service merited 19 Calumet Township Emergency Medical Service personnel certificates of appreciation, which were handed out at a lunch in their honor on Monday, May 18.

Before receiving their awards, Calumet Township Chief Deputy Donna Coleman-Frazier praised their dedication and hard work.

"Although ours is a relatively small unit, it is no less important in the lives of township residents. That is because you are not only well trained and professional, but because you truly care about what you do."

Indiana department of Homeland Security representatives Sherrie Crain and Tom Nowacki also had high praise for the unit.

Along with serving the township's unincorporated area, the unit is an integral part of the national Department of Homeland Security's regionwide rapid response network.

Award Recipients

EMTs

Rayshonn Allen
Benjamin Barnes
Karen Buggs
Justin Clark
Sonji Draper
Morgan Golden
Cymitra Griffin
Rodney Hampton
Sidney Hayes
Andrew Smith
Brandi Smith
William Smith

Michael D. Williams

Thomas Williams

Raymond Willis

DISPATCHERS

David Denson

Rita Headd

Darryl Nelson

Janis Redmond

Expertise Abounds



One way to save taxpayer dollars is to hire multi-talented personnel. That is the case with Thomas "Tommy" Mills, whose versatility includes installing and repairing heating and air-conditioning systems, plumbing, installing wells, electrical conduits and a host of other specialties.

The ArcelorMittal Steel retiree is seen at left welding a brace to hold the metal drain slots above which he's sitting.

"Yeah. I guess you could say I'm pretty handy no matter where I'm put," he said genially.

"No doubt about it," concurred Maintenance Deputy Ed Harris. "Tommy is truly a Jack of all trades. I'll vouch for that, 'cause I'm from U.S. Steel and am familiar with such work."

all hands on deck



Everyone has a say: Trustee Elgin, center in green, seeking suggestions from deputies and supervisors about program.

The April 27 meeting was billed as an “All Hands on Deck” confab and while some considered the nautical terminology a bit overblown, Calumet Township Trustee Mary Elgin stated the words were specially chosen to signify “running a tight ship”.

She said the meeting was called because she noticed there was a backlog of clients waiting for service at various times. Stating that was “unacceptable”, she solicited suggestions to alleviate the problem.

“These are troubled times with a tanking economy and layoffs everywhere. The need is great and growing,” explained Elgin. “While we don’t know what the future holds in

terms of the economy, we certainly know property tax payments aren’t going in to the county sufficiently to generate the funds we need to run smoothly. But it’s also about the possibility of increased demands for township help due to layoffs and plant shutdowns due to the economy.”

Chief Deputy Donna Coleman-Frazier defined the goal as making it a priority to get clients serviced as quickly as possible.

After extensive discussion it was decided to cross-train staff from various departments and compile an “on call” list to deal with the problem. Slots needing support were identified, especially service representatives who

have frontline interaction with clients.

General Assistance Deputy Cynthia Holman-Upshaw, plus supervisors Rose Curtis and Marsha Moore would monitor the situation daily and get assistance from cross-trained backups when needed.

The trustee also reminded the group that the township has policies concerning what employees wear to work and using office telephones for personal phone calls.

It has been observed that backlogs for client service have disappeared since instituting the all hands on deck program.

“It seems things are sailing along in much calmer seas, said the trustee.

township goes green

environmentally-conscious workplace”

The statement continues: “It is the goal of the program to educate staff about our daily impacts on Earth and to provide the tools to take positive actions to protect and sustain our world”. Take that, G-8 leaders!

“World Leaders tell the Earth’s temperature not to rise.” Wall Street Journal, July 10, 2009

Although President Barack Obama and other world leaders meeting in L’Aquila, Italy, played fast and loose with the severity of global warming, Calumet Township chose to go with the dire predictions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

On July 9, Trustee Mary Elgin assembled the township’s deputy trustees (department heads) and laid out an ambitious “Going Green” program. The program, which commences August 1, includes a mission statement to the effect the township “will provide a cost-effective recycling program to educate, promote and encourage an



How will the program work? Employees will be encouraged to bring recyclable paper items such as newspapers, magazines, catalogs, office supplies, and junk mail to be deposited in special bins in the departments. The bins will be collected by maintenance staff as necessary. The goal is to reach two tons of recyclable paper material per

month. Since the township doesn’t generate that much on its own, employees are being encouraged to bring items from their homes and to cadge their neighbors for recycleable stuff.

To make it really interesting, the departments will compete to see which one generates the most material per quarter and the winning staff will be treated to a pizza party.

To its credit, the township is already a participant in the AbitibiBowater company’s recycling program and has won awards previously, but is ratcheting up its participation.

“I hope all employees understand the toll our activities are taking on our planet,” said Elgin. “This is our way, even if only in a small way, to show we care and are doing our part to counteract environmental catastrophe.”

The program is being led by Steven Hunter, IS&T deputy, Kenneth Chapman, main office building manager and Carole Sponaugle, finance administrative assistant.