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## Hope Newsletter January 2025

### Hope-Filled Organization:



### **Bridge Communities provides free transitional housing to more than 100 DuPage County families experiencing homelessness each year.**

**Mission:** The mission of Bridge Communities is to transition families facing homelessness into self-sufficiency by working with partners to provide mentoring, housing, and supportive services.

**Vision:** Our vision is a community where all families are healthy, financially stable, and living in affordable housing.

**Values:** Each of our core values—Partnership, Empowerment, Integrity, Respect, Hope—apply to everyone involved in Bridge Communities – clients, mentors, program partners, volunteers, donors, board members, staff, and community.

**History of Program:** When Mark Milligan and Bob Wahlgren first rented an apartment for a family experiencing homelessness, they didn't know that act of kindness would change their lives forever. Decades later, their vision is being carried out by thousands of people who were inspired by Mark and Bob's story to help others in need.



In 1988, the idea to provide housing and intensive life-skills mentoring to families facing homelessness was met with a degree of skepticism. Many doubted that two businesspeople could change how the community responded to and served families experiencing homelessness.

But Mark and Bob's visionary model, joining each family with a volunteer mentor and professional case manager, has changed the lives of thousands. Bridge has grown and expanded its services during the past three decades, but the commitment to creating change in the lives of families experiencing homelessness has never wavered.

Bridge Communities has become a regional and national leader in transitional housing, as well as the surrounding issues that lead to homelessness, such as lack of affordable housing and well-paid labor jobs. Bridge Communities has

counseled and mentored many non-profits, churches and lay-person organizations on establishing a transitional housing program based on this innovative model.

To learn more about Bridge Communities, click on this link: [Home | Bridge Communities](#) To read about one of the families which was positively impacted by this program, click on this link: [Ambar | Bridge Communities](#)

### Hope-Filled Organization:

## Racine's 'hidden gem':

### The Eco-Justice Center continues environmental education efforts

By Caroline Neal, Racine Journal Times, Dec 2, 2024

CALEDONIA — Growing up in Belgium, Wisconsin, Sister Janet Weyker lived on a farm, surrounded by cows, chickens and pigs, and her family's garden.

Years later, she resided at the Eco-Justice Center in 2004 and said living on the property "felt like coming home."

This year, the Eco-Justice Center, 7133 Michna Road, is celebrating its 20th anniversary. Offering tours, field trips, summer camps and adult programs, the center focuses on education and aims to help mitigate climate change, with features like its own wind turbine, compost bins and solar hot water panels. Founded by the Racine Dominican Sisters, the environmental center is also home to animals such as alpacas, goats and chickens.

"We've been blessed," said Weyker, a founder of the center. "In the beginning, when we said this is a center for community, we ended up saying that community is not just the sisters who started it, but it's all the volunteers and all the visitors and all the friends who helped ... They're all part of the Eco-J community."



Sisters Rose Marie Dischler, from left, Kathleen Bohn, Maryann Weyker, and Janet Weyker gather at the Eco-Justice Center entrance. The four Racine Dominican Sisters are the founders of the Eco-Justice Center.

**The beginning:** Though the Eco-Justice Center didn't officially open until 2004, ideas for it were proposed in April 2000 during a weekend event called "Gather the Dreamers."

At the meeting, about 100 Racine Dominican Sisters from around the country discussed what needs the sisters should work on.

One sister noted that the sisters, although dedicated to education and justice, had not yet addressed justice for the earth. Passionate about caring for land and animals as well as people, Weyker, along with five other sisters, resonated with this idea, jumpstarting the process to turn the concept into a tangible plan.

For the next two years, the group met every six to eight weeks. During this time, Weyker studied earth literacy at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College in Indiana, learning how the world and ecosystems work and the history of how people relate to the land.

From 2002 to 2004, Weyker visited similar organizations founded by sisters, observing their practices, talking to their founders, and then reporting back to the other five sisters.

“Through that, we dreamed up a plan, and we called it the Eco-Justice Center,” she said. “We wanted a place that would show environmental justice (and) sustainability, and we wanted to do that in the context of what we call community — a group of people working together.

”The sisters understood that people lead busy lives, and they wanted the center to be a place for people to walk, sit, relax and be with nature.

“We strongly believe that unless you get to know a place, you’re never going to love it, and if you don’t love it, you’re not going to take care of it,” Weyker said.

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Alpacas have been at the Eco-Justice Center since the beginning. The founding sisters knew they wanted animals on the property but were unsure of what kind. When Sister Janet Weyker studied in Indiana, she learned of alpacas, saying, "They're a very calming creature to watch." The sisters used the fiber for crafts. Photo Caroline Neal.

To read and learn more, click on this link: [https://journaltimes.com/news/local/business/eco-justice-center-environmental-education-efforts/article\\_85664a2e-a14a-11ef-976e-63f679fe79fe.html](https://journaltimes.com/news/local/business/eco-justice-center-environmental-education-efforts/article_85664a2e-a14a-11ef-976e-63f679fe79fe.html)

Hope-Filled Organization:

## JEWISH COUNCIL ON URBAN AFFAIRS



### Shana Tovah from JCUA

By Jessica Schaffer

As we welcome Rosh Hashanah and the Jewish new year of 5785, I am writing to wish our cherished JCUA members, supporters, partners, and allies a meaningful year ahead.



Over the past three and a half months as Executive Director, I have had the privilege of talking with many of you about your unique connections to JCUA and the inspirations behind your justice work. With each conversation, I have gained deeper insight into this remarkable community – a community that is thoughtful, inclusive, and passionate, and profoundly caring of one another.

I have been especially struck by this community's vulnerability and strength during this year of great grief and loss. Committed to our core values of *Tzedek* (justice), *Makom* (place), and *Tikkun* (repair), we have stood alongside one another and our neighbors, leaning into the principle of solidarity that we hold dear, and that we know is central to a future where everyone is safe and can thrive.

This year, click on this link to view a 2.5 minute video of the work JCUA is performing <https://jcu.org/60th-anniversary/?emci=4549c67e-bb64-ef11-991a-6045bdd9e096&emdi=ea000000-0000-0000-0000-000000000001&ceid=%7b%7bContactsEmailID%7d%7d>, we are reaffirming our commitment to building a city and state that is a haven for all. We are marching onward in our fight toward permanent and affordable housing for all; community-sourced public safety solutions that prioritize care over criminalization; and access to healthcare for all of our neighbors, regardless of immigration status. We know that these goals are only achievable if we all work together, so will you join me this year in the fight for justice and equity on behalf of all Illinoisians?

Let's make 5785 a year of dignity and safety for all and let us continue to find strength from one another as we co-create a multiracial democracy where everyone can flourish.

Shana Tova U'Metukah. Best wishes for a year of peace, joy and renewed energy for the hard work ahead.

## Share this Newsletter!

If you find this Newsletter to be a positive contribution to promote Hope and positive changes for now and in the future, please forward this Newsletter to people you think would enjoy it and who may want to share their hopeful stories and programs for future Newsletters. They can sign up for the monthly Newsletters by doing the following:



Hope From the Bottom Up website link: <https://hopefromthebottomup.com/>  
Or send me an email ([robert@robertbeezat.com](mailto:robert@robertbeezat.com) ) with the name and email address  
of the person you think would be interested. I will then contact them.

## Thank You