



## john davies

faces of innovation

# *Launching a 'Safe Place' into Porter County*

**T**hirty-one years ago this month, the Crisis Center launched a great idea called "Safe Place" to help children at risk.

It's a program in which a youngster can walk into a business and ask for help.

The Crisis Center dispatches a driver to pick up the youngster, and then the staff works fast to return the youngster home or provide other assistance.

Today, 188 businesses in Lake County display the



**SHIRLEY CAYLOR**

famous sign of an adult hugging a youngster. Now the Crisis Center is planning to introduce this outreach program into Porter County

this year.

Discovering new and better ways to help youth is the goal of those who work or volunteer here, including two board members just honored by The Times - Mark Maassel and Robert Welsh.

Like so many of life's victories that spring from hopelessness and tragedy, the Crisis Center itself came into existence because of a suicide of a teenage girl.

Shirley Caylor and her late husband Rev. Donald G. Capp co-founded the Crisis Center. They attended a meeting of

they attended a meeting of nearly 50 people at a Glen Park "Y" back in 1970. She remembers a young man, who was the girl's cousin, saying, "If she had had someone to talk with, perhaps she would not have taken her life."

"Because of that young man," Shirley said. "We launched what became the Crisis Center."

Amazingly, this United Way agency has helped 14,000 people.

In honor of her innovation and the accomplishments of this center, the Society of Innovators inducted her as a Fellow. The society was established by Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana Northwest to celebrate innovators and innovation.

At the heart of the center's success in Miller is the right people coming along at the right time. But it is also about inspired leadership. "I believe we can change the future," she said.

With little or no money, Shirley and other volunteers started a crisis line and offered counseling. Now there is Teen Court in which youths are judged by their peers. Last year, none of the more than 100 youths involved got into more trouble - a first in 18 years. Add "Alternative House," which offers residential housing for more than 300 youths a year. New is "Safely Home," in which police routinely bring one runaway a day to the center.

This past January, Shirley had dinner in Washington with Dale Pupillo, who was 17 when he asked people at that meeting to do something that might prevent future tragedies. Today, he heads the Vice President Dick Cheney's Secret Service detail.

What has Shirley learned over these 38 years? "Certainly, that young lady's life made a difference." Then she added, "Yes, people can change the future."

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John Davies is managing director of the Society of Innovators sponsored by Ivy Tech Northwest. The opinion expressed in this column is the writer's and not necessarily that of The Times.