

What this publication “catches” as a “safety-net” has been collectively defined by the many guest columnists who have contributed words describing expertise, services, in-kind volunteer hours, and a profound level of care towards providing relief to the underserved peoples in our diverse communities.

The Monroe County Council’s duties are also often related to these continuums of care. As the fiscal body of County Government, it is my hope that the County Council always aims to create a picture with our taxpayer’s dollars. The picture must reflect the values of our constituents.

Beyond funding, County Council has had cause to applaud the efforts and tireless work of people who have the difficult job of administering justice, alleviating hunger, addressing homelessness, and providing access to public services whose scope includes, but is certainly not limited to, anything from Veteran’s Affairs, translation services in the Circuit Court system, awareness of fraudulent crimes against the elderly, attention to infrastructure for people with disabilities, and enormously unwieldy, painful issues---- such as provisions for children who need shelter care, foster care, and treatment from suffering abuse.

Some of the individuals whom County Government must applaud are Judge Kenneth Todd who has overseen the return of investment in healing human beings through the creation of Drug Court, Ron Thompson who is the Director of the Youth Services Bureau, and Susan Allen of Probation (a recent recipient of both the Order of Augustus and the Brehm Award for Community Service in partnership with Indiana University.) These people are just a few of our proactive local representatives internal to the complex workings of Monroe County Government.

They’re innovative, practical, and deeply knowledgeable people.

In connection to the aforementioned public servants are countless citizens who contribute to our daily, never-ending workloads and governmental processes; our dedicated employees, and citizens who serve on boards, commissions, task forces, advisory committees, and in volunteer programs which partner with our often under funded departments.

Noteworthy are the Citizens for Effective Justice and the organizers of New Leaf/New Life. Ranking very high on County Government’s list of recent accomplishments is the New Leaf/New Life program administered in the Monroe County Jail which fosters therapeutic justice programming to be practiced by experts and willing volunteers. It was an exciting turning point to literally turn a “new leaf” in our jail programming, when this grant-funded opportunity arose in 2006 to facilitate shifting the paradigm of administering justice from one that is associated with punitive measures--- to therapeutic, rehabilitative purposes.

One cannot budget for that which you do not know about. My guiding principle is one that is really very simple. It demands that when setting a fiscal priority, I ask, “Is it fair?”

To that end, I have felt that having a personal perspective of the jail facilities, the youth shelter facilities, is of the utmost importance.

Casting a safety net in troubled waters takes knowing where, and how, to set sail. The opportunity to be informed about local community issues is a rich and rewarding one, if you seize it. It's been a privilege to serve in a community where, long before my involvement in local politics, I had such occasions as to play music for every cellblock in the Monroe County Jail. And to hear the large groups of participating inmates in the jail population burst into song. Similarly, being asked to help benefit Project Safe Place for nearly six years has also deepened my insight into the real needs of the real children who need adults to give voice to their heartbreaking situations.

I am convinced there is always reason to feel hopeful as tough as the situations are.

My personal volunteer services are humbling and enriching experiences that motivate and lift my spirits about public service. Perhaps they're not "newsworthy" aspects of a politician's thought process. So, I'm thankful to Safety-Net's editor, David White, for encouraging our local leaders to blend a bit of a personal touch into our messages! Please know what a special occasion it is to be asked to write in this venue to you, the reader, as we navigate through our community, it's issues, dreams, and hopes together.

Please contact your elected officials to let them know if you think the services, the funding, and priorities of local governments are ample enough, if they make sense, and above all else, if they are fair.

The Justice System is primarily the responsibility of Monroe County Government. But, remember, you, the taxpayer, own this system. It's part of the fabric our society, our "Safety-Net."

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