

**LBWN Celebrates New Identity:
VIA Community Development Corporation**
By Margie Kidder, Sponsorship Services Director

Layton Boulevard West Neighbors (LBWN) is an example of how the School Sisters of St. Francis have remained dedicated to the mission of the three women who founded the congregation in 1874. The sisters have always been guided by the words of their foundress Mother Alexia, who said, “Read the signs of the times, for they are the will of God for us.”



Today, LBWN continues to read the signs of the times. As LBWN begins to celebrate the 25th anniversary of their founding, the core mission and values remain the same, but they are growing, changing, and evolving.

After a year of collaboration and dialogue with neighbors and stakeholders, LBWN met with the Board of Directors and the Provincial Leadership Team of the School Sisters of St. Francis to discuss the ongoing vision for LBWN and the neighborhood it serves. It became clear that the LBWN name was confusing, hard to say in multiple languages, and did not effectively represent what the organization is today. In response, LBWN is rebranding as VIA Community Development Corporation (VIA CDC).

The organization’s mission will continue to be on building strong, healthy neighborhoods where everyone can thrive. VIA’s work will still be anchored in the near South Side neighborhoods surrounding the St. Joseph Center motherhouse.

“Following in the faithful model of the School Sisters of S. Francis, LBWN—and now VIA—are changing with the needs of the times,” said executive director Brianna Sas-Perez. “Our new name and look will help us to better communicate who we are and why we exist, which is to connect people and strengthen places. We look forward to many more years of carrying out the vision, in partnership with our community, that the School Sisters of St. Francis laid out 25 years ago.”

Creating Positive Change for 25 Years

The sisters’ international headquarters was built in the Burnham Park neighborhood in 1887. A century later, the neighborhood was growing less stable and there were concerns about safety, decreasing property values, and reduced business ownership in the area that surrounded the motherhouse.

A task force of sisters evaluated the neighborhood to determine what could be done to create positive change and help the area be the thriving and stable neighborhood it once was. Seeing a need for grassroots neighborhood leadership, VISION Ministries was formed. VISION stood for “Volunteers In Service In Our

Neighborhood.”

From the beginning, the sisters worked with their neighbors, combining their resources to build a community of partnerships with residents, businesses, and institutions. Together, they shared responsibility for ensuring a safe and thriving neighborhood and empowering residents to be the leaders and the voice of the community.

In 1994, after meeting with neighborhood residents, the sisters’ planning team decided to focus on 3 areas: empowering neighborhood leaders, bringing businesses and residents together, and building cooperation between schools and other groups. The following year, sisters and neighborhood leaders held a “Founding Meeting.” LBWN was formed and a mission statement was finalized.

In collaboration with the sisters and LBWN, residents have taken ownership of making this neighborhood a better, safer place to live. They also celebrated the diversity and heritage of the neighborhood.

Since its founding, LBWN has

- Developed over 50 units of affordable housing
- Supported entrepreneurs in creating over 150 jobs and 40 new businesses
- Partnered with homeowners to leverage over \$9 million to improve over 1,000 homes
- Participated alongside more than 30,000 neighbors to host nearly 450 community events Leveraged over \$2.7 million in streetscaping, park renovations, public art and more community improvements
- Celebrated 23 graduates of our Neighbors in Action leadership program

Working alongside neighbors and other stakeholders, LBWN has leveraged over \$50 million in neighborhood investment since 1995. The direct initiatives focus on three components for strong people and places:

- Safe, healthy and well-maintained housing for all
- Jobs and businesses that provide economic opportunity
- Connected, grassroots leaders working together to create the neighborhood they envision

Building for the Future

VISION Ministries, LBWN, and now VIA CDC celebrate 25 years of rich history of School Sisters of S. Francis values and community collaboration. We can see all the visible changes in the neighborhood – improved housing stock, new businesses, increased property values and increased engagement of neighbors.

Over the past 25 years, VIA CDC has become a model community development

corporation that epitomizes quality, high-impact, and comprehensive neighborhood revitalization. Now, the organization's name reflects it.

The School Sister of St. Francis are very proud of all that LBWN has achieved, and we look forward to VIA collaboration with neighbors, board members, and stakeholders to continuing to this ministry together. To learn more about VIA, visit their new website: www.viacdc.org