



## **COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER CELEBRATES 40 YEARS** **Published by Sheila Lovell in the Jessamine Journal**

In the late 1970s, churches in Wilmore were facing a common problem. People in need were approaching church secretaries for help; some of these people would go from church to church. It became apparent that some sort of coordination was necessary to help meet these needs. The Wilmore United Methodist Church, at that time the largest church in town, hired Mrs. Doris Shennum, a trained social worker, to become Director of the church's Caring Ministries.

People's needs, however, transcended church membership boundaries, and so, under Shennum's direction, a community thrift shop was opened in 1980 upstairs over City Hall in Wilmore. Sales of the donated clothes and household goods provided funds for helping local persons in need. The Wilmore-High Bridge Community Service Center was incorporated in 1981 with Doris Shennum as its first Director. The CSC serves people who live within the 40390 zip code.

During the early years of its existence, the CSC struggled to make its presence known. But as the years progressed and its services grew, the organization worked in cooperation with local churches, service clubs, and City Hall. Funds are raised through the sale of clothing and goods in the Thrift Shop, and through grants and individual donations. These funds are then dispensed to help with utilities and rent. The CSC has also helped with emergency needs such as house fires.

In its early days, the Thrift Shop helped to set up Asbury Seminary international student families, many of whom arrived with just their clothes and no household furnishings, remembers Pat Richmond, who was on the Seminary staff and was recruited by Doris Shennum to serve on the CSC Board.

Despite many improvements, made mostly with volunteer labor, the facilities housing the Thrift Shop over City Hall were far from ideal. Parking and accessibility, especially, were lacking. The only entry was up a very steep flight of stairs, which was difficult enough for anyone to negotiate, and impossible for anyone with a disability. For years,

the CSC looked for another location, even considering building its own facilities, but nothing seemed to work out. In 2012, however, under the leadership of Pastor Mike Voigts, the Wilmore United Methodist Church offered the use of their Clark Chapel basement. The agreement called for rent-free occupancy and paid utilities. The Thrift Shop and CSC offices moved there in 2013. This meant that the CSC had come full circle, since it actually began under the leadership of people from the Wilmore UMC.

Since the move was made, the CSC has been able to greatly expand its facilities and services. Ample parking is available along with easier accessibility for clients. The expansion of the Thrift Shop has meant more funds coming into the Needs Assistance program. After the move, and under the leadership of the late Connie Sunda and Rachel Powdrill, the Thrift Shop has averaged a growth in income of over 200% per year from 2013-2019, when they served as directors. Tom Harper, who oversaw the Thrift Store, set an ambitious goal for Thrift Store income after the move to the church basement, a goal which was realized before his recent retirement. The first year of its operation, the CSC's Needs Assistance budget was \$1,300. For 2023 the Needs Assistance budget is \$67,000.

The CSC is a vital part of the Wilmore-High Bridge community. Pat Kelly, its Executive Director, gives leadership to the Food Pantry Ministry, Thrift Store, and to the Needs Assistance programs.

Volunteers from across the city and beyond can be found at the Thrift Store, helping to sort clothing and household items and arrange them attractively for sale. Asbury University students help out as part of their academic programs and community service expectations. Persons in need can find assistance with rent and utilities and, as necessary, referrals to other agencies. A food distribution program takes place weekly on Fridays. A monthly food distribution is available the last Saturday of the month at the Wilmore Presbyterian Church, with major donations from local food drives and from God's Pantry in Lexington.