AN ENDURING PROMISE.

100 YEARS OF CARING

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS INC.

LIFTING HEARTS. BUILDING FUTURES.

100 YEARS OF COMMUNITY

100 YEARS OF HELPING OTHERS
AN ENDURING PROMISE
Making our region a place of promise and opportunity
– a destination for all who labor for a better life
Angela Blanchard
President and CEO
Neighborhood Center, Inc.
In Houston and across the United States, many fine social service organizations provide excellent services to specific narrowly defined client groups by focusing on a single issue or need. What makes Neighborhood Centers Inc. unique is the breadth of its commitment to those people living in the greater Houston area who seek to build better lives for themselves and their children. Over the last 100 years, we have developed a cohesive, holistic approach that has transformed over time to meet the needs of our clients. Through a vast range of programs, partnerships and initiatives, Neighborhood Centers Inc. supports children, families and the aged, by providing needed resources and services, as well as building educational and economic opportunities. This is an agency that is recognized for having a big heart. It really does, which makes me proud to serve on the Neighborhood Centers Board of Directors. From a business perspective, however, more than good intentions are necessary to address the very difficult, complicated social service issues that Neighborhood Centers Inc. deals with on a daily basis.

The agency has built very strong and efficient financial and software systems, bringing a high level of professionalism to tracking and follow-through on all aspects of its services. A long-standing reputation for sound management, fiscal accountability and cost control reflects the agency’s commitment to realizing the full value of every dollar it receives, whether it is contributed through a donation or provided by a government grant. The staff demonstrates a strong ethic. Not only do they have great respect for those who avail themselves of our services, Neighborhood Centers Inc. employees believe in the importance of delivering the benefits and assistance the agency provides. They focus outwardly on the welfare of the people that they serve instead of worrying about internal politics or their position among other non-profits. They are professional, caring and engaged in their work.

For those wishing to contribute toward making a difference in the lives of the disadvantaged, Neighborhood Centers Inc. provides a wonderful volunteer experience. A great many of our volunteers are very involved, bringing not only additional talent and energy to the agency’s efforts but also adding perspective and the benefit of a cross section of skills and experience. The results of the agency’s collective investment in the people and communities we serve are quite astonishing. For instance, the short-term educational advances of children who are in the Head Start Program or Charter School demonstrate we are getting the results that we had hoped to achieve. Measuring longer term results is sometimes more difficult. For example, when Neighborhood Centers Inc. helps deliver child care at no cost or at a highly subsidized cost, the effects can reverberate through a family in terms of the mother’s ability to work, all the way to the ultimate educational attainment of the child who may only be three years old today.

The role of Neighborhood Centers Inc. over the last two decades has become even more essential because of the incredible, explosive demographic changes that have occurred by reason of immigration. Our view is that these people can make - and are making – very important contributions but may need help with the basics in order to achieve the American dream of education, jobs, housing, healthcare, etc.

What we’ve learned over the last 100 years is that there always will be a need for social services. An economic system like ours is not configured to pick up the casualties and help them recover, so that’s where Neighborhood Centers Inc. comes in. While this great agency may not be a household name across all parts of the city, it continues to be integral to the growth and well being of the greater Houston community.

As Neighborhood Centers Inc. celebrates its first century of lifting hearts and building futures, on behalf of the board of directors I salute its indomitable spirit and all of those who have played a part in it. I have no doubt that the best is yet to be.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>1907-1919</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>1920-1939</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>1940-1959</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>1960-1979</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Chapter 5</td>
<td>1980-1999</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chapter 6</td>
<td>2000-2007</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
1907-1919
A dedicated school teacher named Miss Sybil Campbell decided that the harsh living conditions in Houston’s Second Ward during the early 1900’s could no longer be overlooked. The small child, alone and very vulnerable, was waiting for her older brothers and sisters to finish their school day and take her home because their mother had gone out to work.

To Miss Sybil Campbell, the sight must have been a sad commentary on a city that was prospering. A gusher had come in recently at nearby Spindletop, marking the birth of the Texas oil and gas industry. Excavation of the Houston Ship Channel as a deepwater port was under consideration and building projects, some garnering national attention, were surging forward as the pulse of the local economy quickened.

But the side of the city Miss Campbell experienced on a daily basis was a harsher, less hopeful place. Running north of Congress Street and east of Main Street with Buffalo Bayou as its upper boundary, the Second Ward was not only the landing place for boat traffic but also the location for warehouses, cotton compresses and other plants, as well as the railroad yards. Living conditions in general were overcrowded and filthy. While most residents were decent, honest people, they lived shoulder to shoulder with those of less savory reputation. Streets were often muddy and sadly neglected. Children had no access to parks or playgrounds. For many families, especially those who didn’t speak the language and were poor, opportunities to build better lives were limited.

Following dreams of freedom and prosperity they had come - a tide of immigrants from around the world disembarking ships at Galveston, Hispanics fleeing the revolutionary war in Mexico and survivors of the devastating 1900 hurricane that hit nearby Galveston. Houston’s population would swell from 44,683 to 74,000 between 1900 and 1910 and to more than 138,000 by 1920. Many needed help but no social support was available from the community at large or from the government.

Perhaps that’s why the sight of a little girl asleep in the rain touched the heart of Miss Campbell and strengthened her resolve to seek assistance for those who needed it most. She enlisted the support of the Women’s Club of Houston, which built a small cottage on some leased ground in the neighborhood for a free day nursery and kindergarten. Later, along with other teachers, Miss Campbell organized sewing groups for the school girls and for mothers of the younger children.

But Miss Campbell was not yet satisfied. She had a more expansive, powerful measure in mind that would require the forging of a relationship between those who lived in the Second Ward and Houston’s elite population. Miss Campbell made contact with Mrs. Alice Graham Baker, a pillar of Houston society whose husband was a prominent local attorney and community leader. Captain James A. Baker had joined the Rice Institute Board of Trustees in 1891 and would eventually become board chairman of the college that is now called Rice University. When Mrs. Baker heard of the wretched living conditions in the Second Ward, she resolved to look for a way to change them.

“Residents of every section of the city should have a fair chance at proper living conditions and moral surroundings.” – Alice Graham Baker

A dedicated school teacher named Miss Sybil Campbell decided that the harsh living conditions in Houston’s Second Ward during the early 1900’s could no longer be overlooked. A free day nursery and kindergarten for younger children were established, followed by the organization of sewing groups for the older girls and their mothers. Next Miss Campbell sought to attract women of means and influence to become involved, giving birth to the Houston Settlement Association, a forerunner of Neighborhood Center Inc.
With that goal in mind, on February 19, 1907, Mrs. Baker invited 12 of her social peers to the Baker home to discuss a type of neighborhood center that had been pioneered elsewhere with success. Called settlement houses, they provided educational and social programs for immigrants, the working class and the poor in the middle of the communities that they served.

The first settlement house was founded in the heavily industrialized White Chapel area of London, England, where the destitute, near-destitute and poor crowded in and around the tanneries, breweries, foundries, slaughterhouses and fish markets. In 1884, a Church of England clergyman brought people of the upper class to live and work among those less fortunate. They came to “learn as much as to teach, to receive as much as to give,” according to descriptions written at the time. The success of this practical model caught the attention of others interested in addressing social problems and more settlement houses opened, including two very well respected sites in the United States – Hull House founded in Chicago in 1889 and Henry Street House established in New York in 1893.

Defining the Houston Settlement Association’s purpose as extending “educational, industrial, social and friendly aid to all those within our reach,” the ladies, led by Mrs. Baker as president, adopted a constitution and elected officers. They began by educating themselves about the settlement house movement and specific issues in the Second Ward. Then they outlined a plan of action.

The Women’s Club decided to turn its cottage over to the Houston Settlement Association, and the following year two workers were hired. Before long, education and instruction in the English language were offered to Second Ward residents who also were able to participate in four cooking and three sewing classes, a kindergarten, two boys’ and one girls’ club, as well as a club for women. In addition, Houston’s Carnegie Library, which had only been in operation since 1903, established a substation there. Miss Campbell continued to serve on the board of the Houston Settlement Association and was actively involved with the programs offered, conducting a popular story hour for about 60 children.

During 1909, the Houston Settlement Association established a dispensary and first aid room at what had come to be known as Rusk Settlement and employed a nurse to work in the neighborhood. To that end, a nurse, Miss Elizabeth Norment, who was a graduate of Johns Hopkins Training School and a former resident of Hull House in New York, made 1,234 visits to local homes and sent nine persons to the hospital that first year. At the dispensary, 1,161 treatments were given.

Also in 1909, after hiring a trained settlement worker, James Krantz, to direct services, Rusk Settlement continued to expand, emphasizing day care, children’s activities, education for family members, the first classes for the handicapped in the city and basic healthcare.

The industrious Settlement Association staff organized the first Texas State Conference of Charities and Corrections. Held in Houston from November 27 to 29, 1910, the conference brought together representatives from seven cities. The following year, a second conference in Austin had delegates from 22 cities and aid from the University of Texas. A permanent state organization was established at that conference.

Early on, the Houston Settlement Association demonstrated both its ability and agility in addressing needs as they arose in the neighborhood, as well as the courage and conviction necessary to discontinue certain programs or hand them off to other organizations that were better positioned to sustain them. For
Mrs. Alice Graham Baker, who championed the Houston Settlement House Movement in 1907, demonstrated her strong support for the Second Ward Women’s Club members, who were working toward improving their rundown neighborhood. She invited the ladies to her home for a day each year. As her guests prepared to leave in 1916, she presented each with a pin bearing the word “Crusader” and a bouquet of daisies from her garden. In 1930, one of the members, who by then was an elderly lady, still cherished the pin and pressed flowers.

With that goal in mind, on February 19, 1907, Mrs. Baker invited 12 of her social peers to the Baker home to discuss a type of neighborhood center that had been pioneered elsewhere with success. Called settlement houses, they provided educational and social programs for immigrants, the working class and the poor in the middle of the communities that they served.

The first settlement house was founded in the heavily industrialized White Chapel area of London, England, where the destitute, near-destitute and poor crowded in and around the tanneries, breweries, laundrys, slaughterhouses and fish markets. In 1884, a Church of England clergyman brought people of the upper class to live and work among those less fortunate. They came to “learn as much as to teach, to receive as much as to give,” according to descriptions written at the time. The success of this practical model caught the attention of others interested in addressing social problems and more settlement houses opened, including two very well respected sites in the United States – Hull House founded in Chicago in 1889 and Henry Street House established in New York in 1893.

Defining the Houston Settlement Association’s purpose as extending “educational, industrial, social and friendly aid to all those within our reach,” the ladies, led by Mrs. Baker as president, adopted a constitution and elected officers. They began by educating themselves about the settlement house movement and specific issues in the Second Ward. Then they outlined a plan of action.

The Women’s Club decided to turn its cottage over to the Houston Settlement Association, and the following year two workers were hired. Before long, education and instruction in the English language were offered to Second Ward residents who also were able to participate in four cooking and three sewing classes, a kindergarten, two boys’ and one girls’ club, as well as a club for women. In addition, Houston’s Carnegie Library, which had only been in operation since 1903, established a substation there. Miss
discontinue certain programs or hand them off to other organizations that were better positioned to sustain them. For example, Rusk Settlement’s visiting nurses were absorbed into the fledgling Houston Public Health Department in 1914. Also in 1914, the Settlement Association became part of the Social Service Bureau, an agency set up to control all social welfare programs and prevent duplication of programs. Four years later, when the city decided to develop a recreation program for all citizens, the Houston Settlement Association offered friendly cooperation.

Two new settlement houses were established in different parts of Houston between 1916 and 1918. Brackenridge, which was only in operation a short time, first became Saltus Street Day Nursery and later Parkside Nursery School. Bethlehem Settlement was established in an old two-story house on the edge of the African American San Felipe District neighborhood on Buffalo Drive, now Allen Parkway.

By 1910, in Houston’s Second Ward, three out of five people were Jewish, one-fifth were African American, and the remainder were Native Americans and immigrants from Germany, Ireland and Mexico. Rusk Settlement welcomed them all. In 1916, Rusk Settlement was serving 23 nationalities through its well-organized committees of capable women, who were not content with lending only their names to the program.

By 1919, because Rusk Settlement served primarily Hispanics, an even greater emphasis was placed on providing practical English classes.

Campbell continued to serve on the board of the Houston Settlement Association and was actively involved with the programs offered, conducting a popular story hour for about 60 children.

During 1900, the Houston Settlement Association established a dispensary and first aid room at what had come to be known as Rusk Settlement and employed a nurse to work in the neighborhood.

The visiting nurse, Miss Elizabeth Norment, who was a graduate of Johns Hopkins Training School and a former resident of Hull House in New York, made 1,234 visits to local homes and sent nine persons to the hospital that first year. At the dispensary, 1,461 treatments were given.

Also in 1900, after hiring a trained settlement worker, James Krantz, to direct services, Rusk Settlement continued to expand, emphasizing day care, children’s activities, education for family members, the first classes for the handicapped in the city and basic healthcare.

The industrious Settlement Association staff organized the first Texas State Conference of Charities and Corrections. Held in Houston from November 27 to 29, 1910, the conference brought together representatives from seven cities. The following year, a second conference in Austin had delegates from 22 cities and aid from the University of Texas. A permanent state organization was established at that conference.

Early on, the Houston Settlement Association demonstrated both its ability and agility in addressing needs as they arose in the neighborhood, as well as the courage and conviction necessary to
CHAPTER 2
1920-1939
As the third decade of the 20th century dawned, women had won the right to vote and the federal government had banned the sale and manufacture of alcohol. During the decade aptly dubbed the roaring 20s, motorized city fire equipment replaced horses in Houston, bus service was inaugurated between Houston and Dallas, a biplane delivered the city’s first air mail at the new airport and, for two days, a local woman held the world record for marathon dancing at 65 hours and 29 minutes.

Removed from the city’s exuberance, the residents of Houston’s impoverished neighborhoods gratefully turned to their trusted settlement house neighbors. There, they found support and encouragement in a variety of forms. English classes and child care services were offered in 1922. Rice Institute (now Rice University) students were helping with the boys’ club and the game room and girls from Rusk went to a two-week Girl Scout Camp. Because sanitary conditions in the Second Ward were inadequate, Rusk Settlement House gave 650 free baths. In January of 1922, through a cooperative effort with the Houston Foundation’s Employment Bureau, 87 people were placed in jobs. Mothers volunteered, helping with many of the activities.

Settlement house staff sometimes sought out their neighbors when the need arose. Such was the case in 1924 when it became obvious that a large number of children were not in school. With help from the visiting nurses, clinics, teachers and the probation department, Mrs. Need, who looked after the shower baths at Rusk Settlement, increased enrollment at Rusk School by 120 new students in just one month.

The stock market crash in 1929 signaled the start of the Great Depression, which threw staggering numbers of men out of work creating hardship and insecurity throughout the country. More than ever, settlement houses stood as beacons of hope and light in their neighborhoods.

“I was born on October 30, 1929, the day after the stock market crash - Black Tuesday. I started going to Rusk Settlement when I was three or four and I never stopped. They recruited us for a pre-school program before we went to kindergarten. I tell people that if you are going to be born poor, try to be born as close as you can to a settlement house. It was the center of life in the community when I was a child and neighborhood centers still are for many poor people in Houston today,” explains Felix Fraga, former Houston City Council Member and Houston Independent School District Trustee, who is now Vice President of External Relations for Neighborhood Centers.

“When I went to day care, I remember that when it was cold they would give us a sweater to put on, but at the end of the day they’d take it back. They knew if we took them home, we’d never bring them back because we were all from big families and we were...
During the Depression, the best meal of the day for us kids was always at Rusk. Sometimes it was the only meal of the day,” Fraga says of his early experiences with Houston’s first settlement house.

Schotts Bakery sold the settlements day-old bread at a cost of one cent a loaf. The South Texas Producers Association supplied 500 gallons of whole milk and 4,000 gallons of separated milk each month for the nursery and kindergarten children. Other friends of the settlements stepped forward and helped out as well.

The mass unemployment bred anger and frustration among Anglo Houstonians. Resentment smoldered. Houston’s Hispanic population was made to feel unwanted and unwelcome. A group of Second Ward residents meeting at Rusk Settlement House in 1932 formed the Club Pro-Repatriacion to raise funds to help their more unfortunate countrymen return to Mexico. The following May, Rusk Settlement was the departure point for 32 people. In The Houston Chronicle above a photo of Hispanics waving from the back of an old truck, the headline read, “Mexicans Being Shipped to Homeland.”

It is estimated that at least 2,000 of the city’s Hispanics or 15 percent of the total population returned to Mexico during the Depression. The United States’ open border policy of the 1920s was replaced by formal immigration restrictions.

In October 1932, the Houston Superintendent of Schools decided to economize and no longer offer free summer baths to the Rusk School children and settlement members. In response, the Houston Settlement Association sought permission from the Houston City Council to purchase and attach a large sprayer to neighborhood fireplugs. Once or twice a week throughout the heat of the summer, a settlement worker visited each center and roped off the street. Subsequently, children of all ages romped under the spray.

What medicine?

Because so many children were undernourished, cod liver oil was dispensed daily at Cottage Grove Settlement’s nursery school. The head teacher, Mrs. Ruby Hendon, would cheerfully say, “Now children, get your bottled sunshine,” and her charges would accept the dose willingly. A substitute teacher filling in for Mrs. Hendon made the mistake of telling them, “I am going to give you your mashed fish.” Not a child would take it!

Established in 1917 in an old two-story house, Bethlehem Settlement was located between a dump and a notorious vice district. While the dump eventually was removed when Jefferson Davis Hospital was built, the settlement house didn’t survive for long. The city demolished the old building in 1940 to make way for construction of the San Felipe Housing Project.
of its funding from the Community Chest (forerunner to the United Way) was cut, the association reduced staff salaries and sought private donations in order to continue its important work.

Despite this trying economic period, in 1933 two new neighborhood centers opened - Cottage Grove in northwest Houston and Magnolia Park on Canal Street. While classes and services offered were well attended and popular among members of their respective communities, both suffered the same fate. Because its facilities were inadequate and dangerous, Cottage Grove was forced to close in 1934. After Magnolia Park Settlement House was deemed unsafe, efforts to relocate it to the edge of the Hispanic neighborhood proved unpopular with the Anglo neighbors, and it too closed.

Meanwhile at Bethlehem Settlement, which served an African American neighborhood, a small nursery and kindergarten thrived, as did clubs for children of different ages and a community chorus of 35 voices. In 1938, the old house was renovated but the impact of the improvements was short lived because the city announced plans to include the site in the new San Felipe Housing Project. Bethlehem Settlement’s ramshackle home was demolished. In keeping with a general policy urging curtailment of all new activities during the period of war, it was not reestablished to the disappointment of the Houston Settlement Association, as well as members of the African American community it had faithfully served.

History repeated itself when Mrs. Alice Baker Jones, daughter of the Houston Settlement Association’s first president, stepped up in 1934 to co-chair a new settlement project – the development of Friendship House. A neighborhood center that lived up to its name, it was located just off Navigation Boulevard near downtown. Its success and its link with patrons like Mrs. Jones attracted the attention of Christ Church members and led to the establishment of the Caroline Greene Nursery School in a large frame nine-room home bequeathed by Mr. N. Greene, a member of the church.

The settlements offered summer recreation experiences to many youth despite the hardships of the Depression era through effective, innovative partnerships. The children attended camps thanks to the generosity of the Episcopal Diocese, Salesmanship Club, Girl Scouts, YMCA and Optimists Club.
In addition, art and music classes became important components of the settlements during the 1930s. As Houston’s fledgling professional symphony orchestra was developing, the settlements, creative as always, hired some of these musicians as teachers. As a result, the settlements were able to start a small orchestra, create singing groups and offer piano lessons. The settlements’ workers recognized that without education, the dream of a better life would never be achieved for those they served.

During the Depression in the 1930s, men who were out of work for no fault of their own had many empty hours to fill. During that time, Friendship House was established with a cadre of activities that appealed to different age groups and members of the family. This included a new activity for the settlement program, the Friendship Garden Club, sponsored by members of the Southmore Garden Club, that shared surplus plants and seeds.

During the Paris Follies (probably a musical review featuring showgirls) attracted youth from across the city, Miss Sybil Campbell, originator of the Houston Settlement House movement, brought the social evil in their midst to the attention of board members. They protested at a city council meeting and the show subsequently was closed. However, the board made many more protests before the flagrant prostitution near Rusk Settlement was cleared away.

The Houston Settlement Association annually sought opportunities to provide summer camping experiences for the children like the Salesmanship Club Camp where the youngsters pictured below are swimming. In one summer alone, more than 500 children attended camps operated by groups such as the Girl Scouts, YMCA and Optimist Club.

Opened in 1933 on the corner of 75th and Canal Street, Neighborhood House came under scrutiny one day when a vivid account of a boxing match held there was published in The Houston Chronicle. An irate executive protested that the participants must join the boxers’ union. He calmed down when he attended the next bout and saw six kindergarten children wearing boxing gloves march out to compete in three matches, much to the delight of several hundred neighbors.

The first day care center in the downtown area of Houston opened on March 23, 1936. The Caroline Greene Nursery School was named in honor of Mrs. R. Greene, a member of Christ Church, whose home the substantial, nine-room house had been. A group of men from Christ Church not only cleaned up the back yard, they passed it and set up playground equipment and floodlights before the day care center started operation.
CHAPTER 3
1940-1959
In 1940, the fighting continued in Europe as Hitler’s Germany wrestled for supremacy over England and the Soviet Union. Despite the growing magnitude of the conflict and rising fears fed by news reports, many Americans believed this country should not enter the war because, they argued, it was not their fight.

Surprisingly, a similar kind of isolationist mentality was alive and well in the neighborhood surrounding the dazzling new Ripley House facility on Lovejoy Avenue. Opened in March of 1940, the modern two-story structure was located on more than seven acres in Houston’s East End, not in a slum but in the fast growing industrial area under development to meet war needs. It was built with funds willed by Daniel and Edith Ripley, a Houston couple who wished their generous gift be used “for betterment of the community.” The new building would become the new headquarters for the Houston Settlement Association and house the Friendship House “ Anglo-American” program. With its bands of windows, glass bricks and modern lines faced with cream-colored tile and trimmed in metal, Ripley House was the talk of the settlement movement across the country. This enormous new building was such a great departure from the dilapidated surroundings in which most settlement workers had spent their entire lives.

From the beginning, programs offered at Ripley House were similar to those offered at Rusk Settlement but most of the skilled and semi-skilled working class Anglo members of the community, many of whom had moved in from the farms for jobs in the nearby manufacturing plants, demonstrated more pride than gratitude. With stable jobs, a basic education and command of the English language, they considered themselves to be superior to those in the Hispanic communities that the Houston Settlement Association was so experienced in serving. The neighborhood wanted nothing to do with Ripley House.

It must have been particularly challenging for Mrs. Corinnes S. Tsanoff who, as president of the Houston Settlement Association in 1937, had worked very hard and very closely with William D. Cleveland, Jr., chairman of the Ripley Foundation. As the key representatives of the two entities, they had crafted this remarkable partnership in which the foundation provided the money to build the facility and the Houston Settlement Association took responsibility for its day-to-day operation.
“Everyone else at school had a yard but I grew up on the second floor of Ripley House. I was seven when we moved to Houston. Our apartment had two bedrooms, a bathroom and a small living room. The west end of the second floor was living quarters for both the full time and part time staff. It had a communal kitchen, dining room, sitting room and bedrooms. The cook, Lena, prepared three meals a day Monday through Friday and breakfast and lunch on Saturday. We probably had to 20 people there for each meal. I was the only child.

I remember a lot of square dances with the staff in the evenings at Ripley and sing-a-longs with people from the neighborhood where Mother played the piano. I also remember the library, the softball diamond where I played and belonging to the Latin American Club. When I was in junior high, The Ripley Foundation built us a two-bedroom house next to the softball diamond. My back door was about 20 feet from home plate.

Dad worked 12 to 18 hours a day and enjoyed every moment of it. He always wore a suit and tie, even if we went to a Houston baseball game where nobody else did. Dad was always jolly and seemed to have a lot of friends. He was always there for dinner but he was never back home until around midnight. Dad was always over at the settlement house working.”

– Deborah Harrbach Lomax
Felix Fraga remembers Harbach as a man of boundless energy, inspiring both those he served and those with whom he served. As director of the Houston Settlement Association, Harbach built sturdy relationships in the organization, with the people in its neighborhoods, across the strata of Houston business and society and in settlement work worldwide. He was as comfortable trading ideas with Houston benefactress Mrs. W. D. Sharp as he was quietly addressing the problems of a Hispanic immigrant. Never satisfied with the status quo, over time he positioned the Houston Settlement Association not simply to cope with change but to act as the catalyst that drove it.

Emphasizing that he was one of them – the first generation to leave the farm – Harbach gradually won over the neighborhood. Under his leadership and in response to the neighborhood’s changing needs due to the war, Ripley House quickly shook off its malaise and the Houston Settlement Association accelerated into high gear. Almost every day, Ripley House offered an activity for every member of the family – day care, clubs, recreation and classes in English and crafts and more.

“Felix Fraga remembers Harbach as a man of boundless energy, inspiring both those he served and those with whom he served. As director of the Houston Settlement Association, Harbach built sturdy relationships in the organization, with the people in its neighborhoods, across the strata of Houston business and society and in settlement work worldwide. He was as comfortable trading ideas with Houston benefactress Mrs. W. D. Sharp as he was quietly addressing the problems of a Hispanic immigrant. Never satisfied with the status quo, over time he positioned the Houston Settlement Association not simply to cope with change but to act as the catalyst that drove it.

Emphasizing that he was one of them – the first generation to leave the farm – Harbach gradually won over the neighborhood. Under his leadership and in response to the neighborhood’s changing needs due to the war, Ripley House quickly shook off its malaise and the Houston Settlement Association accelerated into high gear. Almost every day, Ripley House offered an activity for every member of the family – day care, clubs, recreation and classes in English and crafts and more.

“We believed that in order to get a higher percentage of our neighborhood involved in their programs, the neighborhood people should have a chance to participate in the decisions. To make this possible, we had a family membership in each program the organization was delivering. In order to even participate in these discussions, it was necessary for your family to buy a $2 annual membership fee. From this group, a committee was elected to work with the staff,” Harbach wrote in his biography.

For the first time, day care for working mothers represented a

“WE HAVE NO INTEREST IN WHETHER HOUSING IS PROVIDED WITH PUBLIC OR PRIVATE FUNDS. WE ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN WORKING TO SEE THAT AMERICAN FAMILIES OF LOW INCOME ARE REMOVED FROM THE HORRORS AND FILTH OF SLUMS.”

— FRANKLIN I. HARBACK, DIRECTOR, HOUSTON SETTLEMENT HOUSE ASSOCIATION
The Ripley House puppetry program was the stuff of which dreams are woven. From an educational perspective, an internal report estimated that in classes where whole plays were presented, parts learned, characters created and a skit or drama created in which children used their imaginations, each was exposed to 22 different arts and crafts. Lee Roy Smith, who was taught the art of marionettes by an elderly woman at Ripley House, Mrs. Bethany, recalls the adventure even today.

“We presented several acts of Frankenstein including the graveyard and laboratory scenes. I actually used an erector set and made a lab table with wheels with a six volt battery underneath so it would rotate. We had two little lights on the top and the marionette that was lying on the table was hooked up to wires and when we said, “Look, he’s alive,” he would rise up. Mrs. Bethany, bless her heart, made the clothes for all the characters.

In the last scene where the monster runs amok, we said, “Look, he has escaped. He’s bigger and he is growing!” I would dress up in this Frankenstein suit and about that time, run out from behind the curtains. The kids were all intently watching the little stage and all of a sudden the character comes to life. They screamed and hollered. I even checked with Mr. Harbach to see if it was OK to keep doing that and he just laughed and said don’t worry about it.

I think all of us guys are better men because of Mrs. Bethany and Mr. Harbach. They taught citizenship and to be aware of what is going on in the world. They were good at seeing what attributes each of us had. They worked to develop us and took more interest in us than say a regular school would. They were very caring.”

– Lee Roy Smith, Former Ripley House Member
House councils representing each of the different settlement house entities were made up of members from the respective communities. Hispanic representatives were named to a bigger settlement association board, a move that recognized and encouraged local leadership. Harbach observed that such leadership would have been "unthinkable" even five years earlier.

Ripley House initiated Spanish classes for Houston Police officers to build trust and respect between those in the neighborhood and local law enforcement. The size of the Ripley House library increased to 45,000 books with an annual circulation of 22,500. Ripley House also offered preventive medical screenings through a liaison with the Baylor College of Medicine, as well as lectures on diabetes, tuberculosis and cancer.

A bus service, organized and run by the Houston Settlement Association, began with two vehicles. Later it would expand to serve other United Fund agencies that needed transportation to carry out their programs. By 1958, the fleet had a total of 16 vehicles.

On the 10th anniversary of Ripley House in 1950, Harbach wrote, "The last seven years were spent in exploring many new fields. We worked with new neighborhoods in our district without curtailing the activity of our original members. We found people in our neighborhoods that were willing to and capable of carrying responsibility of leadership in groups, as well as in policy making boards."

In the world at large, the Korean Conflict broke out and then the Cold War era. Meanwhile at the Houston Settlement Association under Harbach's direction, the Houston United States entered the Cold War era. Two years later in 1954, at a cornerstone ceremony at the corner of Worms and Stonewall, the Ann Taylor Nursery Building was dedicated. "Those present heard this message, "The Day Care Association and the Citizens Committee on the Building Fund are grateful to you for your loyal support and they solicit your continued financial aid and your prayers that the children of this community may have a better opportunity to become worthwhile American citizens."

It was during this time that another legendary leader in social work stepped forward to shape the Day Care Association. — Malcolm Host. Host and Harbach became fast friends, feeding off each other's energy and enthusiasm, resulting in the creation of additional new programs and services.

Born in Wisconsin, Host says growing up he was "kind of a poor kid." After serving in World War II, he went back to school under what was commonly known as the GI bill but officially named the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, which provided for college or vocational education for returning veterans. Host graduated with a Economics Degree from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio and earned his Masters Degree at Indiana University before starting his long and very distinguished career child care management.

As the nursery children build houses with blocks, so, also, does the Settlement build structures of flesh, mind and spirit to become the worthy citizenship of the future. — Radio Station KPRC broadcast excerpt by Elwood Street, Harris County War Chest Director, April 15, 1944.
The pendulum of social change in the United States started to swing on January 20, 1961 when John Fitzgerald Kennedy promised a “New Frontier” in his inaugural address. The 35th president spoke of increasing federal funding for education, providing health care to the elderly and ending racial discrimination through his domestic program. Following Kennedy’s assassination less than three years later, his successor, President Lyndon Baines Johnson, declared that both an unconditional war on poverty in America and an end to racial injustice were necessary to forge “The Great Society.”

Two local private, non-profit organizations well positioned to manage the public money that was being funneled down to communities were the Houston Settlement Association, which changed its name to Neighborhood Centers Association of Houston and Harris County, and the Day Care Association. Franklin Harbach and Malcolm Host had already proven adept at developing the latent potential of individuals, families and neighborhoods in some of Houston’s lowest income neighborhoods. They welcomed the opportunity to bring the additional resources of the federal government to bear on concerns such as the expansion of day care options.

At the time, the general consensus of society was that mothers should not work outside the home. However, the Day Care Association, recognizing that mothers in low income families often had no choice, offered much more than just a safe place to drop off the kids.

"If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich"

– President John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961
"Love was the bottom line. We couldn’t have worked the way we did unless we loved those kids and we instilled love in those children. They got socialization and they got education but not the reading, writing and arithmetic kind. They learned things through activities we provided for them. They also learned how to get along with people and that’s very important for children growing up," explains retired Day Care Association Manager Irma Freeman.

“Our children learned to do many things that they didn’t have the opportunity to do at home,” recalls retired Day Care Association Manager Daisy Young. She regularly took the children in her care on field trips around the city in an old red station wagon. “Children who had never been to Galveston would cross the big bridge and their little eyes would just be wide open. This was their first time to leave Houston. It was a pretty amazing experience for them and for us.”

The Day Care Association took a leadership role in Head Start, a federal government initiative that is the longest-running national school readiness program in the United States. Designed to help underprivileged children make the jump from home to school, Head Start provided comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parental involvement services to low-income children and their families.

“I flew up to Washington every Monday for months helping to design Head Start,” Host recalls. “Ours was the first agency to get public money for day care since World War II so after the United Way published our achievements, I got calls from agencies in different cities to go and talk to them about what we were doing.”

“Vigorous thinking by people like Malcolm Host, spiced with faith and sparked by action, have put the Houston day care system in its present admirable groove. Houston and a very few other enlightened cities, pioneers in the movement for day care, have begun to answer the need. The story of Houston’s fight for day care – and how it is being won - deserves to be told.”

– Ladies Home Journal, July 1966

Franklin
began to buy more buses so we could take some kids to the Head Start and recreation programs. In two years, we created about 45 child care programs.”

A Houston Chronicle editorial on August 27, 1965 highlighted one of the lesser publicized successes. It read, “Head Start’s four and five-year-olds had a brutal picture of the law. They thought of the policeman as someone to ‘stab you…to put you in jail…to shoot you.’ Though not yet in school, they felt an officer was ‘the enemy.’” Police officers were invited to Head Start classrooms. As they talked with the children and explained their work, the image changed. The children came to feel the man in blue was their friend.”

Just as the Head Start program flourished, so did the efforts of the Neighborhood Centers Association. While continuing the traditional outreach activities in the communities where it operated, Neighborhood Centers Association ran an in-school youth program for children from 16 to 18 years of age that allowed the youngsters to be paid with federal aid for working two to 10 hours a week after school in non-profit organizations. In 1968, 250 in-school students and 365 summer enrollees participated. As a part of a 1966 experimental attack on hard-core unemployment in four United States cities including Houston, Neighborhood Centers Association trained field workers to search neighborhoods for people with no jobs or job prospects in order to make the resources of the program available to those who wanted to take advantage of it.

There was a great deal of activity going on in Houston in the 1960’s. Racial tension, although not as alarming as in some other cities, was fanned when African American students from Texas Southern University staged a sit-in. The demonstration in the neighborhood

“When I went to the hospital to visit a friend one day, a young lady in the next bed told me I looked familiar. Immediately I said, ‘Did you go to child care?’ She said, ‘Yes, my day care center was Ann Taylor.’ Oh, this child remembers me, I thought! She was about three years old when I had her in day care and when I saw her at the hospital she was around 22. She said to me, ‘I remember you were really, really nice!’

– Daisy Young, Retired Houston Day Care Association Manager

Day Care Mothers Honored at Program
Fourteen “Day Mothers” were honored November 6, 1961 at the fifth annual Day Parents Meeting of the Day Care Association, a United Fund Agency, which provides day care for the children of working parents.

The day mothers provide the family type care and the individual attention which children under three years especially need. For the school-age child, the family day care home may serve as a day-time base as he goes to the day care home before school and for care after school hours.

Before using a home for day care, the Association studies the home to see if it would be healthy, friendly and desirable place for children to stay. The Association recommends to the State Department of Public Welfare Child Welfare Division that the home be licensed if the home meets the minimum standards set by the State as well as the qualifications set by the Agency.

– Houston Post
spring of 1960 at the lunch counter in a Weingarten grocery store in the Third Ward began the eventual desegregation of restaurants, lunch counters and other public city facilities.

Another forward thinking woman left her indelible mark on the city. Mrs. Walker Benona Sharp, a member of the first board of directors for the Houston Settlement Association, capped her lifelong interest in the organization and in “helping people to develop in their own capacities” by establishing the Estelle Sharp Neighborhood Center in southeast Houston during 1962.

Other new facilities were added to Neighborhood Centers Association’s resources. Also in southeast Houston, the $250,000, 16,000-square-foot Harbach-Ripley Community Center opened in 1962. The Ripley Foundation built its third social service community center on 10 acres in Pasadena. Serving residents of NASA-Clear Lake, the facility covered nearly 14,000 square feet, cost an estimated $275,000 and included a gym, workshop, kitchen, four classrooms and two assembly rooms. All these new locations allowed Neighborhood Centers Association to reach out to its neighbors in different parts of the Houston area.

On September 18, 1961, the city’s population zoomed past one million. Rice Institute changed its name to Rice University, began admitting students of all races and introduced tuition fees. The city dropped the item of race designation on job applications and, like many other Americans, Houstonians were divided over the war in Vietnam. In 1969, when astronaut Neil Armstrong reported the lunar module’s safe landing on the moon, his first words were “Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.”

Also during the decade, an African American female attorney who was born and raised in Houston’s Third Ward, was hired as an aide to Harris County Judge Bill Elliott. Barbara Jordan, an outspoken pioneer of civil rights and the rights of women, served on the board of the Day Care Association before eventually being elected first as a Texas State Senator and later as a United States Representative.

“IF WE CAN REACH THE DEEPLY DEPRIVED, WHERE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOMENT TROUBLE, WE MUST CONVINCE THESE NEIGHBORS INDIVIDUALLY OF THE VALUE OF THE SERVICES AVAILABLE AND DIRECT OUR EFFORTS TOWARD DEVELOPING PROGRAMS WHICH CAN HAVE MEANING FOR THEM.”

Franklin I. Harbach, Consultant, Daniel and Edith Ripley Foundation and Retired Director of the Neighborhood Centers Association of Houston and Harris County

“The quality of the care given children in the Houston-Harris County Community by the Day Care Association is unquestioned. The Day Care Association of Houston is a source of enthusiastic pride for all of us concerned with the welfare of children.”

– Barbara Jordan, Houston Day Care Association Board Member

“There’ll always be a need for an agency like Neighborhood Centers because there’ll always be people on the bottom trying to move up the ladder and people on top trying to hold them down.”

– Franklin I. Harbach, Retired Director of the Houston Settlement Association, 1966

“The quality of the care given children in the Houston-Harris County Community by the Day Care Association is unquestioned. The Day Care Association of Houston is a source of enthusiastic pride for all of us concerned with the welfare of children.”

– Barbara Jordan, Houston Day Care Association Board Member

“There’ll always be a need for an agency like Neighborhood Centers because there’ll always be people on the bottom trying to move up the ladder and people on top trying to hold them down.”

– Franklin I. Harbach, Retired Director of the Houston Settlement Association, 1966
Like streams converging into a river, the Neighborhood Centers Association and Day Care Association merged to form the Neighborhood Centers–Day Care Association in April 1969. At the time, Neighborhood Centers had 70 programs in the areas of child care, youth and families and the elderly. Host became the executive director and Harbach retired in June to assume the role of a consultant with the Ripley Foundation, although his passion for the agency never wavered.

Harbach moved out of his home on the grounds at Ripley House and the newly-appointed Ripley House Director Felix Fraga moved in. The other employees left Ripley House, marking the end of an era.

“A condition of the merger was that the Neighborhood Centers’ offices and the staff living in apartments on the second floor had to move,” Host recalls. “We followed right behind with our gigantic Comprehensive Services Program, which brought together many different agencies. Boy, was that beautiful! Funded by Title XX, it was a first in the community, the region and the nation.”

By 1974, among the services and agencies operating at Ripley House and the Tsanoff-Ripley Building, which was located on the same grounds, were the Texas Rehabilitation Commission, State Welfare Department (food stamp certification), Texas Employment Commission, Model Cities Reading and Study Center, Ripley-Rusk Credit Union, Senior Citizens Nutrition and Recreation, University of Houston College of Optometry (eye exams), Harris County Probation Department, Comprehensive Social Service Program, Harris County Mental Health and Mental Retardation and Neighborhood Medical Clinic of the Hospital District, as well as Dental and Neighborhood Eye Clinics.

“In we can reach the deeply deprived, where serious problems foment trouble, we must convince these neighbors individually of the value of the services available and direct our efforts toward developing programs which can have meaning for them.”

– Franklin I. Harbach, Consultant, Daniel and Edith Ripley Foundation and Retired Director of the Neighborhood Centers Association of Houston and Harris County.

WILLIAM D. CLEVELAND JR., the chairman of the trustees of the Daniel and Edith Ripley Foundation, who died October 6, 1958 was remembered “for his was the understanding spirit which gave to the Neighborhood Centers Association the expanded facilities and additional means to help our neighborhoods develop. Ripley House, Rusk Settlement, Harbach-Ripley Center, Pasadena Center and the Ripley Foundation stand as enduring memorials to the faithfulness with which he kept his trust.”

CORRINNE S. TSANOFF, who served as president of the Houston Settlement Association for seven years and later on the combined Neighborhood Centers – Day Care Association Board, was one of the most influential persons in the establishment of Ripley House. Former Neighborhood Center’s Executive Director Malcolm Host remembers her as “a woman of total dedication who loved people and was concerned about their needs.” Perhaps her greatest legacy is the history book she wrote on the organization’s first 50 years entitled Neighborhood Doorways. Born January 26, 1888, Mrs. Tsanoff passed away in March 1976.
Gradually, a dual role for the agency evolved - coordinator of a multi-agency program, as well as an administrator and operator of service programs.

For two years in the early 1970’s, Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association took over the federally funded youth program in Harris County and throughout the decade was involved in a series of similar programs.

During that era, transportation continued to be big business. Children were moved to after school enrichment programs, the elderly went on outings and traveled to activities at the various centers. Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association also continued to be the transportation resource for other United Way agencies and groups.

In fact, the National Football League contracted with Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association for transportation when the Super Bowl was held at Rice University in 1974. By 1976, the 90-vehicle Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association fleet moved from Ripley House to Harbach Ripley Neighborhood Center. Because the liability involved had increased dramatically and the size of the operation made it difficult to administer, the agency got out of the transportation business in 1978-79 when the City of Houston developed its Metro bus fleet.

The Rev. Jack Womack, pastor at First United Methodist Church in La Porte, recalls the buses he rode while attending after-school programs at Ripley House and Harbach Ripley. "I remember watching movies that ran on a 16 millimeter projector, bowling in the hallway at Ripley House and going on field trips to play golf, swim and ride horses. That after-school program kept me busy and for me to have pleasant memories of that is significant. I was afraid of a lot of things but I was never afraid at Ripley," he says.
CHAPTER 5
1980-1999
Energy prices were at an all-time high back in 1979 and 1980, so in 1981 and 1982 we had a lot of seniors having difficulties but seniors don’t complain. They basically just sit there and either freeze to death or get heat stroke. We started a “Beat the Heat” Program predating SHARE, where we bought a lot of fans and distributed them to seniors.”

– Tom Sanders, Former Neighborhood Centers Inc. Chairman and current board member

The buzzwords “deregulation” and “less government, not more” reflected the priorities of Ronald Reagan’s presidency from 1981 to 1989. Federal cuts in social services included school lunches and subsidized housing for households with incomes of less than $10,000, while the states began shouldering more responsibility for programs that had previously been administered from Washington.

For Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association, “Reagonomics” was simply a new set of rules. The new federal manifesto and increases in state funding fed the agency’s energy and appetite for innovation, while it continued to deliver its core services to children, youths, families and the elderly. It was an exciting era!

SHARE, a unique partnership between Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association and Houston Lighting & Power, was created to assist elderly, handicapped and special hardship customers who could not pay their electric bills. The program was funded by a combination of Houston Lighting & Power customers that donated through their monthly bill payments and matching funds from the electric company. By 1988, Houston Lighting & Power had generated $3.3 million for SHARE recipients and a decade later, approximately 11,000 seniors and disabled people every month were benefiting from the program.

Today, SHARE is recognized as one of the most successful utility customer assistance programs in the United States, demonstrating what can be accomplished when private industry and a social service agency combine forces.

Among the agency initiatives so successful that they withstood the test of time was the Conversational and Cultural Spanish Class for Houston Police Officers. On September 17, 1982, Texas Governor William P. Clements joined Houston Mayor Kathy Whitmire at the Ripley House Auditorium for the 25th graduation.

Several years later, Ballet Folklorico began building cultural bridges across the Houston area and beyond. Energetic groups of five to 12-year-
old Hispanic dancers from Ripley House passed along the lore and music of old Mexico to appreciative audiences.

Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association’s dedication to the development and support of children and youth resulted in the establishment of CHATTERS, a telephone reassurance program for children ages eight to 13. The service provided youngsters who were home alone until their parents returned from work an opportunity to connect with the friendly, listening ear of someone who cared.

By the early 1980s, Ripley House was serving as many as 40,000 people a month. Neighborhood Centers-Day Care Association’s child care program continued to provide quality day care solutions to thousands of parents, while activities and services at the other neighborhood centers also boomed. Shrugging off its more cumbersome old name, the agency entered its most active era yet as Neighborhood Centers Inc.

After 16 years at the helm of the agency, Malcolm Host decided it was time to step down. His respected colleague and a dedicated community leader, Alvin L. (Al) Henry, stepped in to replace...
Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.'s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple's nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Kleins honored for charity donations

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.

Two of Neighborhood Center, Inc.’s most generous and staunch supporters were prominent Houstonians Nathan J. and Amelia Klein. The couple gave the agency a home on the bay in La Porte called Klein Retreat, as well as land in the city at 6447 Prestwood, near Hillcroft and the Southwest Freeway, where the Klein Center opened in 1980. Many years ago, Mr. Klein would ride his horse from the couple’s nearby home to visit the children camping at the retreat.
the Southeast Houston Neighborhood Center near Hobby Airport, and full service centers in Pasadena and La Porte. More than 1,100 children were starting the day at one of 200 licensed day care centers approved by Neighborhood Centers.

The agency’s Comprehensive Service Program in the inner city area made health services, job counseling, citizenship and self-defense training available, including health care assistance to more than 22,000 families with young children. Agency vehicles transported the elderly on field trips, as well as to the Texas Medical Center for life-saving help. Through the Senior Citizen Nutrition Programs hot meals were served at many Neighborhood Centers Inc.’s locations, while students studied GED courses and English. Others exercised, participated in art and after-school day care programs, worked at computer terminals and received tutoring.

Always attentive to the needs of its neighbors, Neighborhood Centers Inc. continued to thrive for several reasons. First, the agency benefited from the strong leadership of Franklin Harbach, Malcolm Host and Al Henry and its positive relationship with the Ripley Foundation. Second, the agency was fearless in developing and trying new, unconventional methods and partnerships to address the developing needs of those it served. Third, its relationship with its core funding source, the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast, remained strong and, fourth, countless volunteers (including board members) were as committed, caring and compassionate as the...
agency’s own management and staff.

One of the people that Henry recruited to provide Neighborhood Centers Inc. with the resources and the mindset to meet the future was a talented certified public accountant from Deloitte Haskins & Sells who also had a background in social services.

Angela Blanchard grew up in Beaumont where the entire family contributed to earning a living from the printing press in the middle bedroom in their rented house. Her parents and the baby shared the first bedroom, while the other six kids slept in the third. She had witnessed what hard work, tenacity and an unwillingness to give up could achieve. After first serving on the board as a volunteer, Blanchard joined Neighborhood Centers Inc. as senior vice president of finance and now leads the agency as president and chief executive officer.

To recognize the dedication and positive impact of volunteers, the first Shirley Weingarten Volunteer of the Year Award was presented in 1987 to Thomas N. Lightsey, Jr. Lightsey and his wife, Betty, who had given scholarships to high school seniors for three years, contributed to the tutoring program at Ripley House and donated funds toward an outdoor stage for cultural programs. The award’s name honored the memory of the late Mrs. Weingarten, a long-time Neighborhood Centers Inc. volunteer and former board president.

When the decision was made to hold the organization’s first capital campaign in 90 years, it was volunteers who agreed to co-chair the effort. Elizabeth Ghrist and Jack Steel rose to the challenge by raising more than $5 million to help Neighborhood Centers Inc. address issues such as inadequate space and the poor physical condition of the agency’s existing buildings.

Meanwhile, in 1990, Neighborhood Centers Inc. was awarded the Child Care Management Services contract, the largest of its kind in the nation, to manage child care for more than 8,500 children each day. In 1992, the agency undertook the country’s largest voucher system contract for day care.

“The needs at Riley House are as great or greater as when I was a youngster. I think the hardest part is that at the time I was growing up in that neighborhood, everybody was low income, so you didn’t know you were poor. You didn’t mind being poor if everyone was poor. Now the gap is much, much greater. I think it’s harder to be poor now than it was back then.”

– Felix Fraga, Vice President of External Affairs, Neighborhood Centers Inc.
Franklin Harbach was a man of vision and, at the same time, eminently practical. His contribution to the development and the delivery of social services in Houston, as well as his influence on the thinking of professionals who worked with him and the people whose lives he touched, is immeasurable.

Tribute by the Philosophical Society of Texas

By 1999, Neighborhood Centers Inc. was serving approximately 300,000 people a year.

Its mission statement, “To enhance the development and full potential of individuals, families and neighborhoods through effective services, responsive programs and appropriate facilities,” remained true to the agency’s humble beginnings in 1967.

“I firmly believed that we could and should be the best human services agency, not just in Houston but in the state and the country. We began recruiting the best people who could help us do this, believing that the best people would provide the best services at a reasonable cost. They would help us get costs down and services out. When I came to Neighborhood Centers, the budget was a little under $8 million and when I left it was a little over $46 million and now it’s over $100 million.”

The first floor of the new Neighborhood Centers Inc. building in Bellaire was the perfect place to establish another day care center. Ray and Hollington Architects created Freedom Station Space for Children, a fun adventure of discovery designed to serve 75 children, ranging in age from three months to pre-kindergarten.

Providing child care options continued to be a cornerstone of the agency. By 1997, Neighborhood Centers Inc. managed the largest governmental contract for subsidized child care in the nation. Through a Texas Workforce Commission program called the Child Care Management Services, federal and state dollars helped eligible families pay for low cost, quality child care. Parents who qualified were either working, in school or moving toward self-sufficiency. Eligible families chose their own local child care arrangements, allowing them to utilize existing resources in their own neighborhoods. Through this highly efficient system, Neighborhood Centers Inc. administered subsidies for more than 10,000 children daily in more than 700 private child care provider facilities. In 1998, the number of children doubled to 20,000 as Neighborhood Centers Inc. expanded its reach to encompass a 13-county region.

Shifts in public policy priorities at the federal and state levels began to create funding gaps for Neighborhood Centers Inc. In an effort to meet and expand its program goals, the agency needed to fill the void with private, unrestricted funds raised through its signature fundraising event. Born in 1997, the agency’s annual Heart of Gold celebration is a leading source of unrestricted funds for the agency as well as an opportunity for Neighborhood Centers Inc. to publicly acknowledge those who have championed its efforts and highlight the successes of the agency’s clients.
CHAPTER 6
2000-2007
Four years later on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina roared through New Orleans leaving calamitous flooding in its wake. Houston sheltered more than 150,000 New Orleans residents, providing short-term refuge for about 24,000 in the Reliant Astrodome. A few weeks later when Hurricane Rita threatened an already tense city, Houstonians, with images of the New Orleans disaster still freshly imprinted on their minds, scrambled to cope.

Neighborhood Centers Inc. responded quickly to the events impacting our city. All four community centers served as distribution sites for flood victims following Tropical Storm Allison’s 2001 rampage. In the four weeks following the flood, 1,253 families representing 2,570 people received emergency services. A total of 306 seniors called in to request services, thanks to the media’s assistance in publicizing a hotline number. More than 300 volunteers from corporations and the ranks of Volunteer Houston rolled up their sleeves and worked alongside the Neighborhood Centers Inc. team.

When Neighborhood Centers Inc. scrutinized the needs of New Orleans residents who took refuge in Houston following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, a unique program dubbed Stay Connected filled a void. Through the timely creation of the communication and information clearing house, Neighborhood Centers Inc. assisted 6,100 hurricane evacuees from more than 2,000 families with emergency services and followed up by continuing to help meet this unprecedented need in the Houston community.

Neighborhood Centers Inc. President and CEO Angela Blanchard.

Despite dire forecasts of crippling computer and communication system meltdowns, the world slipped quietly into the new millennium. The collective relief of Americans was relatively short lived, though, as cataclysmic events unfolded in the early years of the 21st century.

Allison, the worst tropical storm in the history of Houston, dumped 39 inches of rain on some areas of the city on June 5 and 6, 2001, causing approximately $5 billion dollars worth of damage and killing 43 people. Three months later, an unprovoked assault battered the American soul when almost 3,000 were killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a rural field in Pennsylvania. In December 2001, one of the world’s most admired companies and a revered Houston icon imploded. At the time, Enron’s bankruptcy was the largest in United States history, throwing thousands out of work and causing an economic ripple effect across the city.

Allison, despite dire forecasts of crippling computer and communication system meltdowns, the world slipped quietly into the new millennium. The collective relief of Americans was relatively short lived, though, as cataclysmic events unfolded in the early years of the 21st century.

Allison, the worst tropical storm in the history of Houston, dumped 39 inches of rain on some areas of the city on June 5 and 6, 2001, causing approximately $5 billion dollars worth of damage and killing 43 people. Three months later, an unprovoked assault battered the American soul when almost 3,000 were killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a rural field in Pennsylvania. In December 2001, one of the world’s most admired companies and a revered Houston icon imploded. At the time, Enron’s bankruptcy was the largest in United States history, throwing thousands out of work and causing an economic ripple effect across the city.

Despite dire forecasts of crippling computer and communication system meltdowns, the world slipped quietly into the new millennium. The collective relief of Americans was relatively short lived, though, as cataclysmic events unfolded in the early years of the 21st century.

Allison, the worst tropical storm in the history of Houston, dumped 39 inches of rain on some areas of the city on June 5 and 6, 2001, causing approximately $5 billion dollars worth of damage and killing 43 people. Three months later, an unprovoked assault battered the American soul when almost 3,000 were killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a rural field in Pennsylvania. In December 2001, one of the world’s most admired companies and a revered Houston icon imploded. At the time, Enron’s bankruptcy was the largest in United States history, throwing thousands out of work and causing an economic ripple effect across the city.

Allison, the worst tropical storm in the history of Houston, dumped 39 inches of rain on some areas of the city on June 5 and 6, 2001, causing approximately $5 billion dollars worth of damage and killing 43 people. Three months later, an unprovoked assault battered the American soul when almost 3,000 were killed in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a rural field in Pennsylvania. In December 2001, one of the world’s most admired companies and a revered Houston icon imploded. At the time, Enron’s bankruptcy was the largest in United States history, throwing thousands out of work and causing an economic ripple effect across the city.
When Ripley House opened in 1940, five striking panels of cut limestone depicting everyday life in the neighborhood added character to the building. Because they represented a strong visual link to the past, it was decided that these sentinel should not be lost. During the construction of the new Ripley House, the artwork was carefully cut from its frames, crated, moved approximately 500 feet, cleaned and then reinstalled. Together with three large oak trees that have witnessed generations who have played on the grounds, the panels will continue to stand watch over Ripley House and those it serves for decades to come.

Almost half of the proceeds from the Neighborhood Centers Inc. capital campaign was earmarked to create a $9 million endowed emerging needs fund. With approximately 90 percent of the agency’s annual revenue coming from highly restricted government contracts, Neighborhood Centers Inc. recognized the advantages of having quick access to unrestricted funds. This flexibility allowed the agency to take advantage of matching structure that had served the neighborhood faithfully for 60 years was worn out. Working with its ally, the Ripley Foundation, Neighborhood Centers Inc. constructed a new 60,000 square foot structure, which was phased in as the old building was phased out. To better meet the current needs of that neighborhood now and in the future, a complete make-over of the seven-acre site was included in the overhaul.

The story of Ripley House is a story of love, kindness, trust, stewardship and cooperation.

James Greenwood III
Chief Executive Officer, Daniel and Edith Ripley Foundation
Remarks at the dedication of new Ripley House and Campus on April 2, 200
While Neighborhood Centers Inc. is in no way an activist political organization, it is a very strong voice in the community for Houstonians who have inherently little voice because of their economic limitations.

– Jonathan Day, Neighborhood Centers Inc.
2006 Chairman of the Board

Gift opportunities that otherwise might be lost. It could develop new initiatives and demonstration projects. The money would be available to build infrastructure, as well as to address unanticipated funding disruptions and support collaborative efforts with other agencies and the public sector.

What Neighborhood Centers didn’t anticipate was an opportunity that presented itself in 2002 to double the size of the La Porte Neighborhood Center, as well as provide additional and expanded services. A successful $400,000 capital campaign made the pipedream a reality.

Another fundraising effort called the New Century Campaign kicked off in 2005. A portion of the $20 million funds was earmarked to augment the endowment with the bulk of the money targeted for construction of a new facility and reassessment of the five existing community centers – Ripley House, Harbach-Ripley, Cleveland-Ripley, La Porte and Independence Heights Neighborhood Centers Inc.

In conjunction with this initiative, Neighborhood Centers Inc. implemented a new community development approach that emphasized connecting families, developing community leadership and encouraging civic participation with the ultimate goal of igniting economic development. Rather than focusing only on problems or deficits, the new model enables Neighborhood Centers Inc. to identify and build on a community’s strengths, customizing its centers for the 21st century.

The neighborhood chosen for the newest Neighborhood Centers Inc. facility is a three-square-mile area with a population of 16,000 people per square mile. Located in southwest Houston, the Gulfton community is a colorful tapestry of languages, cultures and races.
“Waves of immigrants have arrived in the Houston community over the last decade, not just from Mexico but from all over the world. Part of our new focus is to establish programs and provide resources at Neighborhood Centers Inc. that will foster economic development opportunities for these families. Being able to earn a livelihood enables people to build a family and provide stability for themselves and their families. They become long-term contributors to our neighborhoods, our city and our country. That is the direction that Neighborhood Centers Inc. has started moving toward and I think it’s really on target,” added Board Chairman Jonathan Day.

To be as a centralized community destination for the neighborhood, the multi-dimensional Gulfton Community Campus was planned in partnership with the City of Houston’s multi-service center. In addition to offering traditional social services, it will provide a marketplace for commerce, as well as healthcare and educational facilities.

“As a result of this effort and our joint-planning, we will triple the amount of space offered to the community and set a precedent for a nonprofit and public collaboration that will prove beneficial for our current and future generations,” said Hon. M. J. Khan, Houston City Councilmember, District F.

Felix Fraga believes that the new center will do for Gulfton what Ripley House has done for Houston’s East End.

“The new center at Gulfton is going to give those it serves hope and possibilities, responsibility and education. I hope people will learn how to live together again. In this country, we’ve lost family life and we’ve lost neighborhood life where we knew the people who lived around us. If we can’t bring back family and neighborhood life as it once was, let’s put something of value in its place. Let’s make it work for people now, where they are today,” he said.

Another integral ongoing endeavor at Neighborhood Centers Inc. is its efforts in championing education for its
clients through programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start and Charter Schools. Because not every child can thrive in every school, the agency provides families with options and opportunities that foster a love of learning. The integrated continuum of early care and education that focuses on academic achievement is expected to ultimately lead students to achieve higher levels of education, thus better equipping them for adulthood.

“I don’t think you can send a first grader into a 600, 800 or 900-person school and have any hope that education is going to be transformative for them because no one is ever going to know them. To teach somebody something you have to know them. You have to know what you can expect of them and you have to know what you can ask of them. That’s what happens in charter schools,” Angela Blanchard explained.

Connecting with a host of other agencies, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has continued to leverage its community experience and resources. These relationships ranged from the agency’s long-term partnership with the Ripley Foundation and the United Way of the Texas Gulf Coast to its collaboration with Texas Children’s Pediatric Associates that operate the Ripley House Pediatric Clinic.

The agency also has begun offering services to other nonprofits and government agencies using its expertise in financial reporting and information technology.

For a century, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has discerned what changes lay ahead for its clients, as well as what will remain constant. Its board, staff and volunteers are single-minded in purpose. Every program, every plan, every

“In our centers you’ll never hear the staff’s voices above those of the children. Our staff bends down to make eye contact.”

– Angela Blanchard, President and CEO, Neighborhood Centers Inc.
“What has made Neighborhood Centers successful? Leadership, commitment, integrity, doing the right thing. The agency has a strong set of core values and a clear mission that drives the strategy. I expect Neighborhood Centers to continue to grow and change and go in different directions, as time goes on.”

– Bill Chiles, Neighborhood Center Inc.
Board Member and Great-Nephew of W.D. Cleveland

project, every goal is directed toward achieving the agency’s mission of bringing resources, education and connection to underserved neighborhoods -- lifting hearts and building futures for Houston’s children, adults, elderly and families.

In 2006, Neighborhood Services Inc. had a budget of $133 million and served an estimated 180,000 people in the greater Houston area.

If Mrs. Alice Graham Baker and the other members of the Second Ward Women’s Club could see what has been accomplished over the last 100 years, they no doubt would be pleased. Houston is a better, more hopeful place because of their vision and those who have shared it since 1907.

“There have always been people who want to get across the tracks, across the river, across the ocean. They want to get here,” Angela Blanchard said. “They were born hungry and they have the ‘whatever it takes’ attitude to make a better life for themselves and their children. That is where the potential to develop people has always been and always will be.”

Neighborhood Centers Inc. Board of Directors 2006-07
Stars of the Neighborhood Centers Inc. Volunteer Team

**Volunteer of the Year**

With the presentation of the Volunteer of the Year Award, Neighborhood Centers Inc. annually recognizes the dedication of a volunteer who has demonstrated outstanding service to the agency.

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Since 1998, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has annually recognized an individual who displays the same vision and perseverance as Mrs. Baker and the members of the Second Ward Women’s Club. Each recipient, in his or her own way, has created a lasting means of improving the lives of citizens in our community, is presented with the Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award.

**1996**

Volunteer of the Year

Don Turkelson

Outstanding Group Volunteer of the Year

Daniel and Edith Ripley Foundation Board

**1997**

Volunteer of the Year

Nancy Wooldridge

**1998**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Don Jordan

Volunteer of the Year

Ripley House Advisory Board

**1999**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Elizabeth “Liz” Ghrist

Volunteer of the Year

Jonathon Day

**2000**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Don Jordan

Volunteer of the Year

Ripley House Advisory Board

**2001**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Ann and Stephen Kaufman

Volunteers of the Year

La Porte Advisory Board

Ripley House Advisory Board

NCI-Head Start Policy Council

Healthy Start Consortium

**2002**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Gerald B. Smith

Volunteer of the Year

The La Porte Advisory Board

**2003**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Marc J. Shapiro

Volunteer of the Year

Noel Graubart

**2004**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

Houston Mayor Bill White

Volunteer of the Year

**2005**

Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award

John M. (Jack) Steel accepted posthumously by Barbara Bush

Volunteer of the Year

Tom Sanders

Since 1998, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has annually recognized an individual who displays the same vision and perseverance as Mrs. Baker and the members of the Second Ward Women’s Club. Each recipient, in his or her own way, has created a lasting means of improving the lives of citizens in our community, is presented with the Alice Graham Baker “Crusader” Award.
In Summary

What Has Endured

For 100 years, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has invested in the futures of people struggling to overcome economic, physical and cultural barriers.

For individuals and families with the drive and tenacity to take advantage of its promise, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has created and opened windows of opportunity that have changed with the times. Yet the purpose has remained constant. Tens of thousands of area residents have embarked on the road to self-sufficiency, improving their own lives and the lives of their children by utilizing the tools the agency has provided. Neighborhood Centers Inc. has always touched the lives of others with compassion, respect and understanding.

A quiet catalyst that has worked behind the scenes in Houston, Neighborhood Centers Inc. is a reputable, respected resource that has made a real difference among those seeking a better life.

Every day for a century, the people of Neighborhood Centers Inc. bear witness to the vast human potential in the Houston area and its intrinsic value. That has inspired the agency’s staff, management and volunteers to work passionately on behalf of people of all ages and all nationalities who endure the isolation, helplessness, disillusionment and pain of poverty. For 100 years, Neighborhood Centers Inc. has served as a wellspring for one of the most fundamental of human needs — hope.
Acknowledgements

Neighborhood Centers Inc. is very grateful for the invaluable assistance we received from the following people and organizations that helped us tell our story: Ripley Foundation Board of Directors, Debbie Harbach Lomax, Louise Bakke, Malcolm Host, Jonathan Day, Al Henry, Irma Freeman, Felix Fraga, Daisy Young, Bill Chiles, Tom Saunders, Novena Travis, Fred Paris at the Houston City Library Archives, Don Turkelson, Lisa Moeller, CA at the Rice University Fondren Library Woodson Research Center, the Rev. Jack Womack, Bitsy Polder, Lee Roy Smith, Janetta Morris, Margo Johnson, The Houston Chronicle, The United Way and www.houstonhistory.com.

Neighborhood Centers Inc. also thanks the team that created this remarkable tribute to our first century: Elaine Thomas, Calla Communications, writer; Elizabeth Tindall, LGIBF, project manager and Linda Limb and Elise de Silva, Limb Design, graphic designers.
AN ENDURING PROMISE