“I was hired by Goodwill Industries, working with the developmentally disabled or mentally impaired. I was laid off after five years and couldn’t find another job in the field,” Sister Mary Anna says.

“An Adrian Dominican friend told me Siena Literacy Center needed a computer person. I applied and was hired that day!”

Siena Literacy Center, housed in the former convent of Christ the King Parish, provides basic education for adult learners. Working with volunteer tutors, the center teaches reading, math, computer skills and English as a Second Language (ESL).

“We work on literacy,” Sister Mary Anna notes. “Many of our students were promoted through the grades without the basic skills. Many went on to work jobs where reading and writing weren’t needed. When the jobs evaporated, they needed help.

“We also have a huge influx of students from West Africa who are excellent to work with. They all have jobs and are determined to learn and are grateful for the opportunity.”

Initially, Sister Mary Anna was responsible for monitoring the students in the computer room and helping them with the various software programs. She is now also responsible for completing the necessary forms to secure government funding.

“Funding is based on the number of students we have and their progress,” she explains. “At the start of the fiscal year, I enter students into the state’s database. Throughout the year, I keep track of their hours of instruction and all test scores. And once I’ve compiled my report at the end of the fiscal year, I delete everyone and start again,” laughs Sister Mary Anna.

Although the ministry has its challenges – for instance, getting the work done with so few staff members and being able to motivate students who don’t see the importance of education – it also brings many rewards to Sister Mary Anna.

“Meeting people is probably my biggest reward,” she reflects. “People who come in despite the challenges they face; staff and volunteers who are very easy to work with.

“I’m sometimes unconscious of all the blessings, but I know I’m a better person. They bring it out of you.”