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What they did on their summer vacations

June 18th, 2009 · No Comments

Judy A. Totts | The Gazette

The music's buoyant beat cut through the rain, and like the group of teenagers painting Betty Wright's front porch in Seville, made the day a little brighter.

While Lianna Walker, 14, and her sister, Leslie, 18, both of Omaha, Neb., filled trays with cream-colored paint, Evin Lehman, 14, of Sullivan, Ill., carefully balanced on the top of the brick porch wall and applied a coat of primer.

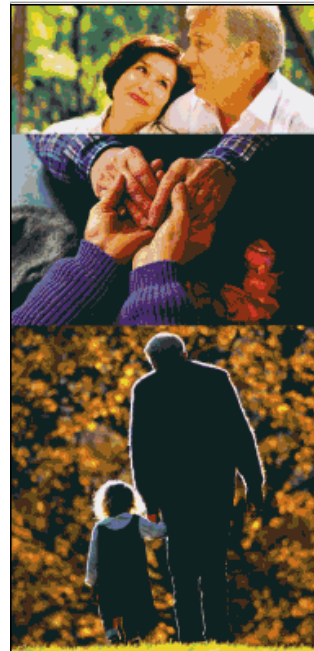
As the teens cranked up the volume of the music and picked their way through toolboxes and buckets loaded with paint rollers and brushes, Sean Campbell, 15, of Fishers, Ind., struggled to replace a recalcitrant board in the porch ceiling.

Campbell, Lehman and the Walkers, plus the 10 other teens working on Wright's home, are among 373 campers who converged on Cloverleaf High School Monday for a weeklong Group Workcamp hosted by Christ the King Lutheran Church in Harrisville Township and the Cloverleaf Local School District. Area residents were invited to submit requests for small home repairs, painting or building projects like wheelchair ramps and decks.



Members of Group Workcamp pitch in Wednesday to repair and paint Betty Wright's home in Seville. The teens and adult leaders, who camp out at Cloverleaf High School for a week, come from all over the United States to participate in home repair projects. (Judy A. Totts | Gazette)

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“My mom’s house needed painting desperately,” said Jane Ann Brock, Wright’s daughter, as she snapped pictures of the group as they primed and painted the porch. “They’re a great bunch of kids. They’ve fixed the porch, and now they’re painting it. We’re invited to the school on Friday night. I don’t know what that’s about, but they want us to come.”

Betty Olah, a member of Christ the King Lutheran, said the Group Workcamp Foundation of Loveland, Colo., has been organizing work camps for teens since 1977, when church youth groups provided flood cleanup assistance near Loveland. The foundation describes the camp as a home repair experience and a chance “to connect with Jesus one nail at a time.”

“Our own kids (church youth group members) have done other work camps, and it was time to do one here,” Olah said. The church spearheaded the effort to raise \$19,000 for project materials and building supplies and invited county residents whose homes needed minor repairs or painting to apply for the program. “There was no financial qualifier.”

“It’s one of the first weeks of summer vacation, and they (the youth groups) have paid to come and work in our community to help Cloverleaf residents,” said Michael J. Maloney Jr. of the Cloverleaf schools as he flagged down Dale Roberts, staff director of the work camp. Maloney gestured at the students hurrying out the doors to catch their rides. “It’s raining out, and they’re all still smiling.”

Roberts, who is president of the Cloverleaf school board and a member of Christ the King Lutheran, said they started the process to bring the camp here about two years ago. He explained four college students set up and run about 60 camps across the United States each year, with assistance from 18 adult volunteers, plus the youth group chaperones. The cost to campers, about \$400, was used for school rental, food and cooking and janitorial fees.

“This is more than just a mission trip,” Roberts said. “The Group Workcamp mission is to foster spiritual growth for teens. The church’s mission is to supply help for the needy in the community. We meet in the middle.”

Earlier that morning in the school cafeteria, the 7 a.m. aroma of maple syrup and pancakes beckoned to sleepy-eyed teens clad in shorts and sweatshirts as they prepared for a day of building, repairing and painting.

A group from Midland, Mich., lingered over the last of their pancakes and scrambled eggs in the cafeteria before heading to the gymnasium where the morning program revved up their enthusiasm for the work ahead.

It was the second Group Workcamp for Brooke Wagner, Becca Mills, Emily Wilson and Steven Rausch, all 16, who attend Blessed Sacrament Church in Midland. For teammate Rachel Stadelmaier, 16, it was the first time around and an experience she thought she’d repeat.

“We have to earn 25 volunteer hours for our church,” Wagner said. “So far we’ve scraped and painted a house, and we’re building a wheelchair ramp.”

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The teens go into the community in groups of six with adult supervision.

“We all get along real well,” Rausch said, explaining they don’t team up with the friends they came with, and the work experience gives them a new way of looking at things.

“Just knowing you helped someone makes you feel better,” Wagner said.

“I just love the experience,” said Megan Loofbourrow, 16, of Louisville, Ky., who’s on her third Group Workcamp trip. “I like being able to help. I like meeting new people and being able to grow closer to God through the work.”

The group attends a morning rally at 8 a.m. to rev up energy levels and faith to take them through the end of their workday at 3 p.m. After some heart-pumping music and a thought-provoking exercise tying work to growing in faith, they board cars and vans bound for work sites scattered across the county and head out.

Each team pauses for devotions at lunch. The entire contingent regroups for supper at the school, with another rally, music and entertainment before lights out. The week will culminate in a special gathering Friday evening that includes the people who received assistance.

The camp staff balances the number of jobs against the number of youth who attend, and Roberts said due to one church canceling, there were a few requests they couldn’t take care of.

Rainy days present another challenge, and any unfinished work will be the church’s responsibility to complete, he said.

“Our goal is to finish all the projects,” he said. “We’re working with other churches, asking for help if it’s needed. We want to help as many people as we can, and we’re hoping other churches will want to do this in two years.

“Our youth group has done work in inner city neighborhoods, and the needs are different here. Many people have the means, but physically can’t do the work. They’re not poor, but the needs are there. The camps need to continue.”

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Filed by [Judy A. Totts](#),
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