



Group Workcamp spruces up Bay City homes

Posted by Andrew Dodson | The Bay City Times July 03, 2009 09:00AM

Ken DeBats went out Wednesday morning to buy milk and two dozen doughnuts for people fixing up his house.

"You gotta treat them nice with this kind of service," said DeBats of Bay City.

DeBats is talking about donated service from [Group Workcamps](#), a Colorado-based nonprofit organization that provides short-term mission trips to help children and adults serve communities around the country.

This is the seventh year the group has been in Bay City, in coordination with First Presbyterian Church, 805 Center.

The work camps started June 14, and a new group of campers arrives each week for seven weeks. An estimated 60 to 70 projects will be completed throughout the summer.

"Our goal is to bring people closer to Jesus and the mission experience," said program director Matt Kammerer, 20, of Georgia. "Working with people in a community is a great way to facilitate that."

Kammerer and two other camp directors live at First Presbyterian Church for the summer, along with each week's group of campers. Campers have daily shower accommodations at the Bay Area Family Y, 111 N. Madison.

"Accommodations are very nice here," Kammerer said. "Some other Group Workcamps around the country require directors to build outdoor shower tents."

DeBats' house on 38th Street received a fresh coat of white paint and brown trim, along with a wheelchair ramp for his wife, Nancy. She has spent the week at Bay Regional Medical Center with kidney complications.

"My wife ain't gonna believe it," said Ken DeBats. "It's like a brand-new house."

A team of eight camp participants worked at the couple's house. About 75 campers were scattered among the Great Lakes Bay Region assisting in other projects. Workers range from 12 to 18 years old, along with adult supervisors.

"It's been a lot of fun and just a great thing to do," said Kevin Rieck, 12, of Chicago, as he scraped paint to prepare the house for a fresh coat. "To see our creation and repairs is an amazing feeling."

Campers pay \$369 for their weeklong experience, not including travel. One group of campers this week came from Nebraska.

The Group Workcamp organization reimburses First Presbyterian Church for all camp-related expenses during the summer, including food, travel and custodial and maintenance work.

New this year is a weekly canned food drive. Each week, incoming campers are encouraged to bring at least five items for donation to local food banks.

The first week's group of campers brought in more than 1,000 food items.

"There is a need for food, and this is a great additional opportunity for the mission outreach program," Kammerer said.

How to help

Community members can sponsor a Group Workcamp site by providing lunches or snacks for campers. If interested, contact First Presbyterian Church at (989) 892-1591.

© 2009 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.