

FEATURES



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2B ASK THE EXPERTS | 4B OBITUARIES | 5B CHURCHES



Far left, Roger Ulmer, Ted Bidigare, Sean Motley, Alek Wilson and Scott Bricker level out the swing set. Left, the park includes two picnic tables, two grills, a trash receptacle, swing set and bench.

Creating community

First English partners with LifeBUILDERS to build park

By Jody McVeigh
Editor

One could say it was a match made in heaven.

Congregants of First English Evangelical Lutheran Church earlier this year struck up a partnership with LifeBUILDERS Detroit, an organization whose mission is to restore dignity and provide hope to residents of the Regent Park neighborhood of Detroit by reducing blight, empowering youth and sharing the gospel.

Conducting outreach is nothing new to First English, whose members in the past have donated \$10,000 to drought relief in Africa and annually fills the church's hallways with food and clothing for the less fortunate at Christmastime.

But there was something about the LifeBUILDERS project that stood out to the Rev. Sean Motley, First English senior pastor. Motley, who grew up in Chicago and has served there as well as Wisconsin, moved to Grosse Pointe three years ago.

"One thing I've heard since I've lived in Grosse Pointe is that Grosse Pointe people don't care about anybody else," Motley said, "that they only take care of each other in their own isolated little bubble."

So when his congregation became excited earlier this year when the



PHOTOS BY KELLEY BIDIGARE

Ted Bidigare, Scott Bricker, Roger Ulmer and Sean Motley install a bench on the lot.

church earmarked \$6,000 for mission work, Motley got excited with them.

"This (mission work) is what Grosse Pointe people do. ... That's the kind of people who are members of this congregation and community. They provide care and compassion and outreach to people all over the Detroit area. ... My experience

has been of many kind, caring, loving people who want to see their neighbor do well, whether their neighbor is a block away or three and a half miles away."

Nearly 14 years ago, LifeBUILDERS began working in the Regent Park neighborhood of Detroit with a goal of sharing the Gospel with



Jack Bidigare clears the sidewalk near the park.



Sean Motley, Ted Bidigare, Alek Wilson, Roger Ulmer and Scott Bricker finish cementing the swing set into the ground.



Scott Bricker positions a tree as Sue Ulmer looks on.

families in the area. Not only has the organization rehabbed homes that were able to be rebuilt, but blight has been reduced, an early childhood education facility is

opening and children are playing in safer surroundings.

"We have an obligation to take care of our neighbors right down the street from us," Motley said. "If we're not working in our own community, then I don't understand who we are as a church."

"I have seen people who use their finances to help others and I've seen people who use their blood, sweat and tears," he continued. "We saw this as an opportunity to partner with them and support the ministry they have and support Regent Park. We want to show them their brothers and

sisters in Grosse Pointe care about them and God cares about them."

Through two Saturdays of intensive labor in high temperatures, 25 members of First English — and a few young neighbors — took an empty lot at Shakespeare and Fairmount and transformed it into a pocket park. They installed a swing set, two picnic tables, two grills, a bench, garbage can and message board; trimmed back shrubbery around the perimeter, edged along the sidewalk and took down a dead tree; removed trash and old fencing; planted six trees and laid wood chips around the swing set and benches.

"It's all commercial park-grade materials," Motley said. "It's steel and plastic coated. It's good quality and will last."

Motley said he hopes to have a light installed for added safety, but for the time being LifeBUILDERS is patrolling the area.

"Our goal is to make sure this stays nice," Motley said, adding LifeBUILDERS also is caring for the lawn, emptying trash and keeping the area litter free.

"It's a clean, safe space in the neighborhood," he said. "It's something to take pride in. ... Every resident I've met has been good, salt-of-the-earth people who want what's good."

Motley said it was an honor for his congregation to be involved in the project and he's looking forward to partnering with LifeBUILDERS on other future projects.

"Words are great, but words have to lead to action as well," he said. "Every word of God is a call to be — to be the creation God intends us to be."

"I'm thankful

See PARK, page 2B

About LifeBUILDERS

Larry and Marilyn Johnson have been involved in serving the underserved in under-resourced communities more than 15 years.

Prior to starting LifeBUILDERS, the Johnsons were living the American dream. After successful careers, they were faced with deciding what to do with their lives. They chose to make themselves available to

serve. Though family and friends thought they were crazy, according to the LifeBUILDERS website, the Johnsons moved to the community they were led to serve, "the big 48205," once designated Detroit's most deadly ZIP code. There they would serve the broken-hearted, downtrodden and those with little hope and few

opportunities who suffered injustice and abuse most of their lives.

Today, that area has become a community on the rebound, thanks to LifeBUILDERS, whose mission is to restore dignity and provide hope to the residents of Regent Park in north-east Detroit. This is accomplished in three ways: by empowering youth with life skills

and providing opportunities to grow and learn in a safe environment; reclaiming an entire neighborhood from the effects of disinvestment by providing high-quality, affordable housing; and building a community of shared values, trust and hope for the future, all grounded in the truth of God's word. For more information, visit lifebuildersdetroit.com.

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2B | FEATURES

ASK THE EXPERTS By Training & Treatment Innovations

What to expect from Mental Health First Aid training

Q: Can you tell me about the Mental Health First Aid training sessions offered through The Family Center this fall? Who should attend and what can we expect if we do?

A: Just like First Aid and CPR training provide people with the skills to help someone experiencing a physical health crisis, Mental Health First Aid is a course designed for lay people, to provide the skills needed to reach out to a person experiencing a mental health crisis. There are two primary formats for MHFA — adults and youth. The fall session in September is focused on youth. The Youth Mental Health First Aid course is designed for adults who work with young people, ages 12 to 18 — teachers, coaches, leaders of faith communities, social workers and other caring citizens. Anyone is welcome to attend.

You are more likely to encounter someone — friend, family member, student, neighbor or member of the community — in an emotional or

mental crisis than someone having a heart attack. Youth Mental Health First Aid teaches a five-step action plan to offer initial help to young people showing signs of a mental illness or in a crisis and connect them with the appropriate professional, peer, social or self-help care.

The training introduces participants to the unique risk factors and warning signs of mental health problems in adolescents, builds understanding of the importance of early intervention and teaches individuals how to help a youth experiencing a mental health crisis or challenge. You will participate in role-playing and simulations to demonstrate how to assess a mental health crisis.

Often, when someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, the people around them do not intervene because they don't know what to do and are afraid of making the situation worse by "saying the wrong thing." This course does not train participants to diagnose or provide any counseling or therapy.

SAVE the DATES

Mental Health First Aid Training: For Adults Working/Interacting with Youth, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Wednesdays, Sept. 19 and 26, at Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, 16 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms.

Presented by The Family Center in partnership with Training & Treatment Innovations Inc., and Grosse Pointe Memorial Church.

Participants must attend both sessions to receive the three-year certification.

Attendance for this free program is limited to 30 pre-registered participants. Register online at familycenterweb.org or call (313) 447-1374.

Instead, it offers concrete tools and answers key questions like, "What do I do?" and "Where can someone find help?"

For more than 25 years, TTI has provided behavioral health services and support to individuals and families affected by disability. While the agency has six offices serving southeast Michigan, offices in Sterling Heights and Troy serve Macomb and Oakland county residents.

The Family Center's mission is to serve the community through programs and resources vital to today's families. As a nonprofit organization, it is completely supported by community donations. To learn more, visit familycenterweb.org, call (313) 477-1374 or email info@familycenterweb.org.

Artists Association hosts meet-the-teachers reception

It is back to classes for the Grosse Pointe Artists Association, which offers a full schedule of classes beginning Thursday, Sept. 6, at The War Memorial, 32 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms.

Many of the classes and workshops are offered evenings or weekends so working people can attend.

"The goal is to offer a creative outlet for as many people as possible," said GPAA President Karen Pope. "Students of all skill levels will appreciate the encouraging and constructive approach of our teachers."

Fall class offerings include a range of opportunities to learn new techniques, from the ancient Greek encaustic method of pigments mixed with hot wax to Bokashi shading in Japanese woodblock printing.

The fall teaching staff includes past favorites like Bette Prudden and new teachers like Angelo Sherman.

Prudden, famous for her portraits of many people in the Grosse Pointes, offers a class in watercolor — one of the more difficult media to master.

Sherman, an award-winning artist, debuts as a GPAA teacher with a class on developing one's own style.

Those interested are invited to meet the teach-



"Rex Begonia" by Bette Prudden.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAREN POPE

Above, "Return of the Prodigal Son" by Angelo Sherman. Left, a sample of Bokashi shading by Nobuko Yamasaki.

ers and their students at a reception 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 23, in the Presidents' Room at The War Memorial. While there, patrons also may take in the current exhibition, "Artmakers at The War Memorial," which includes work by GPAA

teachers and students, as well as the Independent Artists group that meets Mondays at The War Memorial.

For more information on the classes and exhibition, go to grossepointeartcenter.org or call (313) 881-3454.

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AREA ACTIVITIES

War Memorial

The War Memorial, 32 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms, hosts Sunset Yoga + Wine beginning with yoga 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 23. Cocktail hour begins 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$40. Call (313) 881-7511 or visit warmemorial.org.

Library

The Grosse Pointe Public Library board meets 6:30 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 23, at Central Library, 10 Kercheval, Grosse Pointe Farms.

BNI

Business Network International meets 7 a.m. Friday, Aug. 24, at Christ the King Lutheran Church, 20338 Mack, Grosse Pointe Woods. Call Ryan Marier at (313) 638-7526.

Ford House

The Edsel & Eleanor Ford House, 1100 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Shores, offers a bird walk with expert spotters 8 to 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug.

25. Cost is \$5.

The Ford House offers tours of its grounds 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 28.

The Ford House offers an architecture tour of the estate 12:30 to 2 p.m. Friday, Aug. 31. Cost is \$15 for members, \$18 for non-members.

Visit fordhouse.org for tickets to these events and other information.

Toastmasters

Northeastern Toastmasters meets 7 p.m. Monday, Aug. 27, at the Mary Ellen Stempfle University Center, 19305 Vernier, Harper Woods. Call Wendy Bradley at (313) 884-1184 or Ron or Marcia Pikielak at (313) 884-4201.

Senior Men

The Grosse Pointe Senior Men's Club meets 11 a.m. Tuesday, Aug. 28, at The War Memorial, 32 Lakeshore, Grosse Pointe Farms.

Rotary

Grosse Pointe Rotary meets 6 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 29, at The War Memorial, 32 Lakeshore,

Grosse Pointe Farms. Grosse Pointe Yacht Club Commodore Sean Schotthoefer and General Manager Aaron Wagner speak. Cost is \$10 and includes snacks; a cash bar is available. Visit grossepointerotary.org.

Blood drive

The American Red Cross hosts the following blood drives:

◆ 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday, Aug. 31, Pointe Fitness, 19556 Harper, Harper Woods.

◆ 11:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 4, Grosse Pointe Woods Community Center, 20025 Mack Plaza.

Register at redcrossblood.org.

Woods Community Center

The Grosse Pointe Woods Community Center, 20025 Mack Plaza, offers a trip to Frankenmuth Thursday, Sept. 6. Cost is \$12 for Woods residents, \$15 for non-residents, and includes a carriage ride or river cruise, chicken dinner and shopping. Reservations are required by Tuesday, Sept. 4. Call (313) 343-2430.

PARK:

Continued from page 1B

LifeBUILDERS gave us the opportunity to be involved," he continued, "and the opportunity for people in the community to support their neighbors in Detroit. Everybody we met in the neighborhood was fantastic — they're all thankful and supportive."

Motley said

LifeBUILDERS, founded by former Grosse Pointers Larry and Marilyn Johnson, is trying to restore Regent Park block by block. It currently owns and plans to rehab two houses adjacent to the new park.

"Two miles down the road, if that neighborhood falls apart, our neighborhood is next," Motley said. "If the east side of Detroit becomes stronger, our neighbor-

hood becomes stronger. ... Somebody has to stand up when they see a problem. We have an obligation to look out for fellow citizens."

First English and LifeBUILDERS is planning to dedicate the park in a couple weeks. The community is welcome to attend.

"We want to build more than a park," he said. "What we're trying to build is hope."