

GROWING TOGETHER

By Brian Beckman

Can you believe that summer days are waning? As a kid I remember Labor Day as a work day around our house on Maple Street. The only kind of ladder I knew back then was the one my dad stood on every Labor Day to stain our house with Redwood Rez. Mom was inside canning (either peaches, pickles or beets) with our TV locked on the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy Telethon. Nick Elliott, owner of the Shelby Pavilion back in the day, was involved in fundraising for Jerry's Kids at the skating rink. During the Labor Day weekend, people around the county drove to the rink to drop off donations.

How things have changed! The skating rink was the hangout for kids in my youth; today The Ladder is the hangout. Over the summer, The Ladder never missed a day of being a hangout with our youth program, Summer Break Out. One woman, whose three children were involved in Summer Break Out, had been praying early in the spring about opportunities for her children during the summer months. She said, "The Ladder is an answer to my prayers. I am so thankful for this place."

Share Your Story

The weekly activities included a Groove Day: an opportunity to experience fun adventures in our community and beyond; a Go Day: a service day in our village to bless our neighbors; and Grow Days: time to be in relationship with Jesus and others. On Grow days we played games; read; talked about Jesus, the Bible, and other important topics; and ate together. It was a privilege sitting around the table on Grow Days with the young men and women as adults shared God's Word, followed by a discussion. Adults and youth listened and spoke of things near to their hearts.

*Brad, a middle school youth, happened upon The Ladder at the end of June and started to attend daily. One day late in August, as the leaders and youth were eating together, Brad began sharing his story with those sitting at his table. Upon my request for him to share with everyone, he stood up and continued to tell the entire group of his early years before adoption and life after adoption. He specifically told of how blessed he feels by the commitment his adoptive mom and dad have shown him. Bear in mind, this is coming from the mouth of a soon-to-be eighth grader. The other youth intently listened to what Brad had to say, gaining a new respect for him. What a privilege to be in the café that day in The Ladder.

My wife Sue was present when Brad shared his story. Later that evening, she said, "Where else could he have felt safe and comfortable to share his story? With his friends? No! At school? No! At The Ladder? YES!" That is why The Ladder is such an extraordinary place—a place that is safe and trustworthy.

Life Lessons

For much of the summer two young men, *Kim and *Michael, attended Break Out, but we noticed a pattern: just before the Bible lesson, they would leave the center. In July Kim decided to attend Unity 2022, a Christian music festival in Muskegon, with The Ladder group. After attending Unity, he started to stay for the Bible lessons. Then Michael began staying, as well. Now both have the Bible app on their phone and volunteer to read aloud the passage from their phones to the group. Sometimes they ask questions, too. Amazing!

During the last week of summer, Phillip, a youth leader at The Ladder, taught the Bible lesson, and Kim and Michael were in attendance. Phillip started by praying for their time together. When he asked someone to read Matthew 22:37-39, Michael volunteered.

Phillip then asked each youth and adult sitting around the table to rank the relationships in their life from most important to least important.

Matthew 22:37-39

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Next he asked, "Did any of you include 'myself' on the list?" Several adults and students shared their list, but no one had "myself" on the list.

Phillip asked, "Well, what does the Bible say?"

One person replied, "Love God and love your neighbor."

"Is that all?" Phillip asked. "If we stop at just loving our neighbor, we pass over the key to loving our neighbor. According to Jesus, the key to loving our neighbor is first loving ourselves."

The lesson went on, but the discussion afterward changed to the list they made of important people in their lives. They talked about who they placed on their list and who didn't make the list. The adults talked about their dads mainly. One adult spoke of a dad that was absent in her family's life, another talked about having a dad that was one way in public and another way at home, and yet another mentioned having a dad that passed away when he and his siblings were young.

I watched the youth sitting around the table, who were living out similar situations with their dads. This was obviously important to them; their attention was locked on the speaker. It was so healthy for our youth to hear adults speaking of the pain of not having a dad or having a dysfunctional dad.

Our Youth and Men's Coach, Troy, ended by addressing the group. "Do you all see the importance of a Dad?" he asked. Then he spoke into each of the young men present. "Kim, you are going to be a great dad; Michael, you will be a terrific dad; and Brad, you will be an awesome dad and grandpa!" Then everyone chuckled.

It is such a privilege and honor to be able to spend time with these amazing young people. I leave feeling blessed every day. It is essential to have adult volunteer mentors surround these young men and women, speaking life into them. Where else could our youth be able to share their story and listen to authentic dialogue of things that really matter in life?

**This name has been changed to maintain privacy.*

YOUTH &

A Break Out Summer for Youth

By Troy Love

Jesus took his friends on incredible adventures. Remember the mountaintop experience he gave friends in Matthew 17? Jesus showed his friends the joy of serving. Remember the five loaves and two fish? Jesus continuously taught his friends about the Kingdom of God. When Jesus' friends experienced these things, they went on to impact the whole world for Christ!

This summer we did the same thing for the youth. We took them on 11 incredible adventures that we called Escape Trips. Each adventure, whether it was Michigan's Adventure, horseback riding or canoeing, was accompanied with a lesson about how that experience can be applied to a closer walk with Jesus.

One of the favorites for the kids was attending Day Zero at Unity Christian Music Festival. These kids had never been to a concert before. It was priceless to see their shocked faces when they walked in and saw a massive crowd of 15,000 people in one place to listen to loud music glorifying our Savior and King. Before leaving we circled up to pray and share favorite things about the experience. One of the parents who attended said, "This was one of the most special things I've ever done with my son." Praise God!

Interestingly, more youth showed up for our Serve (Go) days than for our Escape Trip (Groove) days. Don't tell me kids don't enjoy serving! On two occasions this summer, we went out and pulled every weed growing in downtown Shelby. The first time, the kids had so much fun beautifying their town, they picked 100 pounds of weeds in an hour! One woman walked out of a downtown business and said, "I just don't see teens working like this anymore." On another Serve day, after being served a delicious dinner at The Ladder, one mother said with grateful emotion, "My son has never served me like this before." We are connecting youth to their families. We are showing our youth the joy of serving. We are teaching them not to be ordinary, but extraordinary, to reflect the extraordinary Jesus.

Thank you to all of the people who donated and volunteered to make these experiences possible for our youth. We pray that, like Jesus' friends, these experiences will inspire these kids to impact the whole world for Christ!

Why are youth here?

I asked the youth why they think kids should come to Summer Break Out. Here are some of the responses:

18-year-old boy: "It's fun, and you meet new people."

11-year-old girl: "It's amazing!"

12-year-old boy: "You get good messages and get true stuff and not evil."

14-year-old boy: "It's awesomely fun!"

15-year-old boy: "It's a blast every day, and we get to grow our faith."

12-year-old boy: "It has taken me away from video games, and I'm more active. I don't even want to play video games anymore."

How's that for a Break Out Summer!



Youth volunteer Brenda helped the youth prepare and serve their families a spaghetti dinner with all the trimmings! L-R: Brenda, Oli, Max, Ellie, Alex, and Sabrina.



What a blast worshipping the Lord with our youth at Unity! Clockwise from left: Mechele, Ann, Brandy, Jaden, Katherine, Ellie, Max, Oli, Alden, and Brian.



The youth demonstrated teamwork and encouragement on the ropes course. L-R: Max, Elijah, Jaden, and Ellie.

Our Mission

The Ladder helps people pursue God by building caring relationships and sharing God's Truth. The coaches enthusiastically guide adults and youth to love God by following Jesus, living in step with the Holy Spirit, reading God's Word, loving people, and making disciples.

& FAMILY

HERO Jump Starts October 8!

By Troy Love

Two of the toughest 'hoods to live in these days are manhood and fatherhood. I am sick and tired of the world trying to destroy Biblical manhood and fatherhood. The consequences for our children are devastating.

Kids who do not have an involved father or mentor in their life:

- are twice as likely to end their marriage in divorce;
- are twice as likely to become dependent on government welfare;
- have higher rates of behavioral disorders, chemical dependency and being incarcerated.

These facts confirm the final words of the Old Testament in the book of Malachi where God's Word says, "Unless the hearts of fathers are turned to their children and the hearts of the children are turned to their fathers, the land will be struck with a curse."¹ In many ways we are experiencing the curse in our community. Our land does not have to be cursed. It's time to do something about it. Why not us? Why not now?

The Ladder is firing up a men's ministry called HERO: Manhood God's Way. The world's way of doing manhood stinks. When a man does manhood God's way, he becomes a HERO. He is a HERO husband, father, grandfather and citizen. We want to create a HERO culture in our community by kicking off a series of events that will intentionally connect men of all ages for journeying together in the ways of manhood God's way. We will build a community of men, husbands and fathers who pass on the HERO culture to succeeding generations.

The kickoff event will be on Saturday, October 8 from 9:30am to 5:30pm. It is called, "Gentlemen....Start Your Engines!" The all-day event will have a car racing theme to attract men 12 years and older. It will be a day of fun, eating, and listening to each other. The Saturday event will be followed by a series of eight Tuesday evening men's meetings called "Pit Stops." The goal of all of this is to connect HERO men with other men and youth in a relationship that goes beyond our scheduled events, which will lead to mentoring men into a lifestyle of manhood God's way.

First and foremost, we would very much appreciate your prayer for this bold and necessary endeavor. Your financial and volunteer support will also be appreciated. To sign up for the event, scan the QR code below.

For more information, please email Troy:
troy@theladdercommunitycenter.com

¹Malachi 4:6

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&

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GENTLEMEN... START YOUR ENGINES!



AN EPIC DAY FOR MEN!

For \$5, you will:

- ◆ Eat 2 huge man-sized meals!
- ◆ Build cars!
- ◆ Race RC Cars!
- ◆ Smash Cars!
- ◆ Take home a shirt & a ton of loot!

**Bring your son(s) 12 years
or older at no extra cost!**

Event is limited to 60 men.

Sign up at:

theladdercommunitycenter.com/hero



HERO

MANHOOD GOD'S WAY

Our Vision

The Ladder is a friendly, intergenerational, and ethnically unified community center aimed at loving God and knowing and serving neighbors, so that individuals and families are transformed. Together we will make Jesus famous in our community.

OUR FRIENDS

Pat Tate



By Vicki Davey

What does it mean to be chosen? Who amongst us hasn't waited expectantly for our name to be called, leaning forward, eager for the thrill of being selected? How wonderful would it be to feel special and set apart—perhaps singled out for some unknown purpose? This is the amazing life of Pat Lewis Tate.

From her very beginning, Pat was chosen for something special when she was placed in the arms of her adoptive parents, Ivan and Hazel Lewis, and brought into a loving home eager to bloom into a family. With the great fortune to be next-door neighbors of Frank Wynn's kids, ten "good as" brothers and sisters stood by, ready for play. It wouldn't prove to be all play, however; Mr. Lewis and Mr. Wynn went into partnership to form what is now Cherry Hill Supermarket, and soon enough there was work to be done in and around the family business.

After graduating from Shelby High School, Pat was chosen to attend Mercy Central School of Nursing. This career fit well with the personality of someone like Pat, who is eager to be on the move and loves serving others. One day, while working at Hart Hospital, she joined a friend for a quick social trip to Flint. There she met Max Tate, who—although a Crystal Valley lad—was working at an automotive plant in Flint. It was clear that Max chose Pat also, since as she put it, "He was looking at me more than I was looking at him." Eventually the wooing paid off, and Max and Pat married in Shelby during June of 1953. Their marriage was a long and happy one, blessed with four children.

Most importantly, Pat has also been chosen by God, and she has spent her life dedicated to His service. She taught Sunday school, participated in Bible studies, and sang in the church choir. While she may be on her own now, Pat certainly isn't idle. She works at Love INC two days a week. She loves playing dominos and bingo at The Ladder, worships the Lord with us on Saturday evenings, and orders meals from us every weekday. She even gives beyond what the meals cost in order to help pay for others.

It's a challenge to sum up a life of 92 years, but if you get to know Pat, she will tell you the rest.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

By Vicki Davey

"How beautiful, the feet that bring the sound of Good News and the love of the King. How beautiful, the hands that serve the wine and the bread and the sons of the Earth...How beautiful... is the body of Christ." —lyric by Twila Paris. I could find no more perfect words than these to describe Jennifer Jensen.

The road that brought Jennifer to The Ladder started in Illinois near Chicago, where she was born. Raised in faith, she grew in her love for God and others as she traveled life's path through adolescence, then college, onto marriage and family. Jennifer and her husband of 27 years, Todd, met in college in a statistics class. (What are the odds of that?) When a job change opened opportunities of where to go next, the small community of Claybanks sprang forward as an option. Jennifer's husband had visited family in the area as a youth, and those good memories must have lingered.

The next stop on this journey is the farm that they purchased and have since made their life's work, which they named First Fruits Farm. Here, the lessons of reliance on God for the blessings bestowed and the friendship of strangers sent to meet the need were made regularly visible. Farming is busy work. Asparagus in springtime and apples in the fall fill the days with a beehive of activity. At the end of asparagus season, she opens her asparagus field to gleaners as scripture dictates.

Jennifer volunteers at The Ladder once a week, serving lunch to the visitors and members alike with a joyful heart, a warm and genuine smile, eyes that sparkle when she laughs, and a very efficient step. She fills in for other volunteers whenever she is able, which is a huge blessing. On the first day Jennifer served at The Ladder, the health inspector made a surprise visit. Jennifer took it all in stride, having previous experience with similar inspections on the farm, where she is the food safety manager.

With two of her children off to college and one still at home, Jennifer seeks additional ways to serve the community. She mentors two high school girls, is a storyteller for her church's Sunday school class, and co-hosts a church small group with her husband regularly.

How grateful we are that Jennifer shares her time and heart with us. We are richer indeed as a result.

Jennifer Jensen

