



RAILS & RUNGS Newsletter

ON MISSION TO MAKE DISCIPLES

By Brian Beckman

Thank you, dear friends, for being on the journey with God and The Ladder. We have been serving this community and surrounding area for seven years as of February 16. Yes, can you believe, seven years! We are grateful to all who have contributed and are contributing. Some of you pray, some of you give time, and many of you give of your resources. We are grateful for all of you. We cannot do this work without you. We need you!

About five years ago, Stuart Carver, Executive Director of Family God’s Way, challenged me, “Brian you have to multiply yourself,” meaning that I had to be on mission with Jesus to make disciples. He guided us to retool The Ladder to help others pursue God. Over the next two years, the staff developed a mission statement. This mission is not just my mission or the staff’s mission, but it is the mission of every volunteer who signed on to be a community champion—a person committed to speaking and spreading The Ladder’s mission.

The Ladder’s 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.

After the staff developed the mission, the next essential element was to define a disciple. The staff wrestled with this task. After much deliberation, we came up with this:

A Disciple is One Who...

- **DECIDES:** Turns and follows Jesus
- **GROWS:** Is being changed by Jesus
 1. Reads the Bible daily
 2. Talks to God regularly
 3. Listens to and obeys the Holy Spirit
 4. Connects to the body of Christ
- **GOES:** Is on mission with Jesus to make disciples (Relational Discipleship)
 1. Prays with and for people
 2. Loves people by building caring relationships
 3. Coaches Biblical truth and shares testimony
 4. Models Christ

The first person we are to disciple is ourselves. Jesus says, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40). This happens when we commit to growing and becoming more like Jesus through His Word, prayer, obedience to the Spirit, and fellowship. As we become more like Jesus, we become more effective in carrying out His mission. Real Christian maturity is being on mission with Jesus to help people pursue God.

Read the list of a disciple’s qualities and ask yourself three questions:

1. Have I decided to turn away from my brokenness and follow Jesus?
2. Am I growing—being changed by Jesus?
3. Am I on mission with Jesus to go make disciples in our broken world?

Jesus commands us to make disciples, bringing men, women, and children into the Kingdom with His help, so they in turn make disciples.

Matthew 28: 19-20

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

I encourage you to pray about these important aspects. Please consider taking steps forward in pursuing God and recruiting others to join the movement.

Hit the Mark

By Troy Love

To be an excellent dart player, you have to be able to hit the target. That sounds simple and obvious, but it requires intense focus, proper alignment, follow-through, and the ability to deal with pressure. The player who is able to do this consistently will win. Winning as a man also requires intense focus, proper alignment, follow-through and the ability to deal with pressure. To add to the difficulty, the world presents men with a lot of targets to aim at and shoot for.

Unfortunately, many men work hard to hit these marks, only to find that they have been deceived, disappointed, deflated and defeated. HERO reminds and encourages men to aim and to hit the mark by doing manhood God's way. It's the target that we, as men, were designed by God to hit. When we do hit the mark, we become godly men, husbands, fathers, grandfathers, employees, and citizens who change the culture in our homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities for God's glory.

On Saturday, February 18, men from our community piled into The Ladder for our second major HERO event, "Hit the Mark." It featured a dart tournament, a number of other target-hitting competitions, and a lunch that definitely hit the spot. Fathers brought sons, men brought friends, and some men came by themselves, but every man left honored, celebrated, and challenged to be HERO men. Throughout the three-hour event, we scheduled "Pit Stops," times when men would discuss questions like, "What are important marks you want to hit as a man?" and "What keeps you going in really difficult times?" The conversations were honest, meaningful and rich, which led to mutual respect, admiration and tremendous camaraderie. Powerful!

The event was followed by the first of eight Pit Stops that take place every Tuesday evening from 6:30 to 7:30 at The Ladder. The purpose of Pit Stops is to forge connections with other men in order to encourage each other in doing manhood God's way. We originally planned to have eight weeks of Pit Stops after our first kickoff event in October. After the eighth week, the men (who vary in age from 12 to 74) did not want to stop. Eight weeks turned into sixteen weeks, and there seems to be no end in sight!

It's exciting to see a desire in men to be a HERO by doing manhood God's way. All men are welcome to join the movement. Your presence at our events, your prayers, and your financial support will be vital in creating a HERO culture. I know God will bless generations in our community when we hit His mark!



The competition was fierce!

Sharing God's Love

By Mechele Martinez Gonzales

The Ladder's intergenerational Valentine's Party on February 8 was a big hit! More than 45 people attended, including youth, young-at-heart, volunteers, and staff. We celebrated friendship, love for one another, and God's love for us. We enjoyed snacks, crafts, games, and cookie decorating.

For the craft, everyone practiced their tying skills by decorating a wooden heart wreath with ribbon. *Tommy, a youth, said excitedly, "I'm going to save my heart for when I get married!" Many played the bunco game and had a great time. Adults who knew how to play taught the other youth and adults, and before we knew it, people were yelling, "Bunco!" and switching tables for the next round with a new partner! The really fun part? They all chose a prize at the end!

The best part of the party happened during the devotion, when The Ladder's Youth Coach, Troy, shared the Word of God. Everyone chuckled as he told the story of how he proposed to his wife. Then he began to talk about our proposal from God. Love—God's love—filled the room, and everyone was attentive to what Troy was saying. I'm confident that we all took part in experiencing the Holy Spirit—and God's love story for every one of us.

Everyone present took home candy, cookies, a craft, a prize, and great memories. I believe all of our hearts were full of love, too. It is wonderful to celebrate and give praise together here at The Ladder. We are all truly blessed!

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



L-R: Zella, Angel, Alex, and Sue teamed up for bunco!

L-R: Dane, Ashlyn, Mechele, Rachel, Mindy, and Suzanne tied and tied again to create beautiful heart wreaths!



Our Mission

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HERO

MANHOOD GOD'S WAY
Dart Tourney Champs



Top photo L-R:
4-man champs Rex, Gabe, Scott,
and Isaiah!

Middle photo L-R:
2-man champs Tim and Chuck!

Bottom photo:
Individual champ Phillip!

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Sharon Zoller

By Vicki Davey

"Here I am. Send me." These are the words of the prophet Isaiah when God asked who will go out into the world to be His representative (see Isaiah 6:8). A living, breathing example of this attitude can be found in Sharon Zoller, who has been a volunteer at The Ladder since it opened in 2016.

Sharon serves on Wednesday afternoons, interacting and making connections with the sixth to twelfth grade students who attend our after-school program, The Huddle. The Ladder is truly blessed that Sharon chooses to share her time and talents reaching out to our teens. So how does one come to develop such a caring, giving heart? It helps to be a "people" person.



Born and raised in Hart to Wes and Helen Carlson, Sharon began her "others-focused" ways when she was inspired by her third grade teacher to become a teacher herself one day. After high school, she attended Grand Valley State College in furtherance of that goal and succeeded in obtaining her teaching certificate. She has been working with young people ever since. Teaching second through fourth grade during her career, Sharon retired from Benona Elementary School after 33 years of service. Not one to be idle, however, she passed the next seven years working with fifth and sixth graders in Shelby Schools' ASPIRE program.

A servant's heart seeks ways to make a difference, so you may not be surprised to learn that Sharon also volunteers weekly at Love INC in Shelby, participates in Friends of the Library, is an active serving member of the Stony Lake Property Owners Association, and is a deputy clerk for Benona Township. She also has various leadership roles at the New Era Christian Reformed Church. Among those roles is heading up a program called Coffee Break, a Bible study group for women.

Even busy servants of the Lord benefit from a little R & R. Sharon finds fun on the pickleball court, as well as paddling a kayak or heading out on the pontoon boat launched from her Stony Lake home. An annual tradition of summertime camping at Mears State Park, which began when she was a child with her family, has carried on since her 1981 marriage to Dave Zoller. It's a special time spent relaxing with their two children and often includes Dave's mother. The Zollers also love to travel; they have now visited all 50 states, as well as some places in Europe.

Of all the many things she does, Sharon says that she just loves connecting with people. She sees this as her personal ministry, showing God's love through example, to impact the lives of others. Thank you, Sharon, for your servant heart!

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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

Doug Brown

By Vicki Davey

What do you get when you put four Michiganders in a room with a deck of cards? Euchre. Place that game of euchre at a table in The Ladder, and you get a rollicking good time with a chance to meet Doug Brown.

Our friend Doug was born and raised in East Detroit. A life-long Wesleyan, he sang in a quartet with three other lads he knew from their church. This local fab four may not have had the Beatles' haircuts, but they did have their own fan base. A trio of young ladies followed them from venue to venue. In 1968, one of these young ladies, Bunny, became his wife.

As a young man, part of Doug's schooling involved training at RETS (Radio-Electronic-Television Schools) in Detroit, where he learned electronics and turned that into a career in the automotive electronics industry. He was set up to work for Chrysler when Uncle Sam came knocking, requiring him to head to Fort Polk, LA, for training prior to being shipped to Vietnam. When his training was finished and the orders came through, he discovered his destination was not Vietnam, but Warner Barracks at Bamberg, Germany. In Germany, Doug became a radio commander chief in the armored tank division.

After the war, Doug returned home to Michigan. He and Bunny relocated to Howell, where they raised their two sons. While there, he earned his electrical engineering degree, continued to work for Chrysler, and climbed the ranks until he became a supervisor. They took family vacations to the Silver Lake/Mears area for camping and fun on the dunes. After retirement called, then called again, and yet again (he kept being compelled to return to the workforce after each retirement), Doug and Bunny decided to move to their favorite vacation spot. In the fall of 2018, Mears became home.

These days you will find Doug enjoying retired life on his beautiful six-acre property just half a mile from Lake Michigan. He may be out riding the dunes in a Jeep, taking his euchre skills from place to place, or standing in faith as a valiant prayer warrior for The Ladder, but the ultimate lesson to learn from Doug is that the best trick you can take is to live authentically for God and others while walking along life's path.



LIVE WELL

Pursuing God's best in mind, body, & spirit

Love is Patient and Kind 1 Corinthians 13:4

By Sue Beckman

Kids Hope USA is a national movement that connects Christ followers with a child "in need" at the local elementary school. One adult, one child, one hour, one day a week for one school year. It's the power of one – a one-on-one relationship

with a child. Elementary school children may be referred because they struggle academically, but most are referred simply because they need the love and support and encouragement of a caring adult – one who says, "I believe in you! I am for you!" Of course, what child doesn't need that?

In the fall of 2022, The Ladder began a partnership with Thomas Read Elementary School in Shelby. The administration and staff have welcomed us into the school with open arms. Twelve people were trained to be Kids Hope mentors. Twelve more people committed to pray for these relationships. We prayed fervently for two things:

1. That our mentors would be instruments of Christ's love, available for His use;
2. That our students would receive the love of a mentor and (one day) receive the love of Christ.

We waited for all things to be put in place. As the Kids Hope Director, I had the privilege of being with each mentor on their first day, when introductions to the teacher and child took place. Here is a story of one mentor meeting her Kids Hope child.

Lisa, a Kids Hope mentor, was excited to meet with six-year-old *Liam. We had been delayed in kicking off the relationship because Liam's mom was having second thoughts about her child's involvement in Kids Hope. We waited and prayed. Once his mom gave permission, Lisa – prayerfully and with great anticipation – stepped into Liam's classroom.

The teacher went over to tell Liam that he had a special friend waiting for him at the door. Liam hid under the table. Lisa and I stepped out of the classroom and prayed. After a couple of minutes, Liam and the teacher stepped out of the class-

room. Lisa knelt down and said, "Hi Liam. I'm Ms. Lisa, and I would love to be your Kids Hope friend!" Liam, head down, didn't respond or make eye contact. Lisa asked Liam if he would show her around the school. She wanted to see all his favorite things to do. Again, Liam didn't respond; he paused briefly before walking slowly down the hallway with Lisa. I found a seat near the office, waiting for the next mentor to come.

After a few minutes, I caught a glimpse of Liam looking hesitantly at Lisa and saying a few words. Forty minutes later, I crossed paths with Lisa and Liam again, just outside his classroom. Liam was smiling and talking freely with Lisa. He then gave her a BIG hug, not wanting to let go. After Lisa encouraged him to return to the classroom, Liam turned and walked in, and then made one last dash to Lisa for one more hug!

That day, I saw more than Liam and Lisa's journey to a trusting, joy-filled relationship. I saw both kids and adults "under the table" hiding from God; reluctant to talk with God, let alone look at Him. God lovingly pursues them, and in time, a conversation begins; few words at first, and more as time goes on. They sense a loving Father. Then one day, they decide they want to trust. They run to God and embrace Him. Secure in their new relationship, they run back to Him again and again. Could mentors – instruments of Christ's love – be used to open a child's heart to a trusting, joy-filled relationship with our Savior? We pray so.

Because of your prayers, your giving, and your encouragement, YOU are a part of impacting a life through a Kids Hope relationship. We are grateful.

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



Mentors Lisa and Jennifer and prayer partner Phillip learned kid-friendly games at The Ladder's Kids Hope Kickoff event in January.