



# RAILS & RUNGS Newsletter

## TAKING ACTION

By Brian Beckman

We are so grateful that you are part of The Ladder cast. We cannot do this work without the role that you play. The staff and volunteers are on stage, but you are our supporting cast, praying and investing your hard-earned money. Your name is scrolling down the credits of The Ladder movement—God’s movement. God is pleased that you are involved in doing His work, and so are we. God Bless You!

In our January donor letter, I had written the following:

*We have been praying about how to come alongside parents of our youth to make them the hero of their child’s story. We have intentionally designed events to include parents. Mechele Martinez Gonzales, our Youth and Family Coach, has called every parent of every child that comes through the door of The Ladder. We have prayed for these relationships. However, we have seen very few engage with The Ladder. But God has been answering our prayers, in ways we never expected. Families are experiencing heartache, challenges, and tragedy.*

*Because of our persistence in reaching out to them, two families that remained very distant and seldom responded to Mechele called The Ladder staff in their time of need. Both families had their child expelled from school. Troy and Mechele were the first people both parents called upon hearing about their child’s predicament. The Ladder staff has walked this path with these two families in a very personal way. We developed contracts that outlined the responsibilities for the child, the parents, and The Ladder. Many volunteers have joined the staff to help provide instruction, Bible teaching/discipleship, transportation, community service opportunities, advice on curriculum, funds for the materials chosen, and support at court hearings.*

This has been a huge undertaking for Mechele. Please see page 3 of this issue for an update on the journey these two youth have experienced.

\*Max, one of the youth expelled from school, comes to The Ladder on Mondays. Max, along with his discipleship mentor, \*Bill, participate in one hour of discipleship training every Monday.

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

They read the Bible together, then ask three questions:

- 1) “What does this passage say about God?”
- 2) “What does this passage say about us (mankind)?”
- 3) “How am I to respond?” or “How am I to obey?” In other words, “What step is God asking me to take?”

After discussing these two questions, they prayerfully read the passage again, seeking to answer the third question:

After a few weeks of discipling, Max made the decision to follow Jesus. We celebrate this important first step in Max’s spiritual journey. But this is only the beginning.

Sue Beckman, The Ladder’s Wellness Coach, wrote in the November-December 2023 Newsletter:

*The Bible makes it clear that we grow in our relationship with Jesus by reading and responding to the Word of God (James 1:25). Reading and responding. Hearing and obeying. Eugene Peterson describes discipleship as a “long obedience in the same direction.” It is simply deciding to take a step of obedience and then, tomorrow, take that step again.*

Not only is discipleship training happening for Max, but also for his Mom and others. It is our goal to have mentors disciple those who want to grow. Thank God for His provisions coming through all of you, His power to redeem lives, His peace to settle each one of us, His presence to know he is right beside us, and His protection from the evil one. Thanks for the role you played in Max’s transformation. Remember, you are part of this God movement!

### The Ladder’s Vision:

*The Ladder is God’s movement mobilizing and equipping men, women, youth and children to bring the love of Jesus to every person and every home so that Oceana County is transformed in the name of Christ.*

# YOUTH & FAMILY

## A Community That Makes God Smile

By Troy Love

I think we all dream of being in a family where we are genuinely excited to be with each other; young and old, sitting around a table enjoying conversation.



*Jerry and Enrique enjoying each other's company over lunch.*

God exists in community – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Can you imagine how much fun that community is? The oneness, the comfort level, the conversation, and the mutual respect must be amazing! God has placed His image on us. When we experience a community where there is oneness, comfort, great conversation and mutual respect, it is incredible....and incredibly Godly! This is a picture of what happened on February 21 at The Ladder. Once a month, Shelby has a half day of school. This provides an opportunity for middle and high school Huddle youth to come to The Ladder and join our adults for a special day called “Eats and Arts.”

Truth be told, the first two times we did this, it was a little awkward. It appears that those days are long gone as evidenced by the volume of the conversation and smiles as 13 youth and 14 older people sat around tables genuinely enjoying each other's company. There was such a comfort level that a 14-year-old girl, unprompted, asked if she could read something from her Bible to everyone before lunch began. She blessed us all!



*Jade's masterpiece!*



*Youth and adults joined together to create three different crafts.*

In the days leading up to the event, I had the youth write prayers for specific adults that had signed up for the event. Not only were the adults blessed by the prayer cards, but it also built an anticipation and excitement to meet the people for whom they had been praying. A 12-year-old girl came through the door, excited to meet the adult she was praying for, and asked, “Is Debbi here?” Debbi was indeed here, and they hit it off beautifully!

After the meal, we got into the Word together and then worked side-by-side making crafts. I marveled at the beauty of young and old Ladder family members coming together as one big family with mutual respect and joy. This is the kind of community our Creator designed us for, and He must smile as He looks at what happens at The Ladder.

## Walking Through the Fire

By Brian Beckman

Our prayer has been that we could have an impact on the families of our community. The world encourages us to be “victims” of tragedy instead of rising up and trusting God to take us through the fire. Psalm 46:1 declares, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” The LORD recently gave us an opportunity to impact the families of a house fire in Shelby.

\*Carlos, an eighth grader, has been coming to The Ladder for almost two years. One Monday night in early February, his family awakened to a fire ravaging their home. Michelle Deuling, our Office and Kitchen Manager, and her husband Todd, pastor of the Shelby Wesleyan church, gathered all the people standing outside the burning house and brought them into the church. Mechele Martinez Gonzales, our Youth and Family Coach, was called in to comfort Carlos' family—especially his mom, with whom we have built a caring relationship. Mechele also translated for the two Hispanic families. Troy Love, our Youth and Men's Coach, was called to give support to Huddle member Carlos. Ladder volunteers Ann, Noreen, and Carmine came to assist as well, along with many other folks not associated with The Ladder.

Mechele and Pastor Todd, through the Wesleyan Church, have been the

point people receiving monetary donations and items of clothing. This is another door that has opened for us to come alongside Carlos' family. Sorting through all the donations, searching for their documents in the fire rubble, and giving a listening ear help us to be Jesus' hands and feet. It has afforded opportunities to take Carlos' mom shopping, to the doctor, and to walk her through the process of getting the family back on their feet. The family is currently searching for a place to live. It is important to them that they remain in Shelby because Carlos' mom has seen much growth in him since he began attending The Ladder.

Additionally, Mechele is walking with the other family displaced by the fire. Even though their children are too young to attend The Ladder, this family is still a valuable part of our community. Mechele has helped meet their needs as well. She checks in on them frequently to ask how they are doing.

The Ladder is an amazing place with amazing people! Thanks to the staff and volunteers for responding so quickly and lovingly. We are grateful to Ladder members and community members for all donations given through the Wesleyan Church directly for the two families. We are humbled by the response of many. To God be the glory!

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

### Our Mission

- Loving God by knowing and serving Jesus
- Loving people by building caring relationships and sharing God's Word boldly.

# A Learning Experience

By Mechele Martinez Gonzales

Late last year, two of our youth who regularly attended The Huddle were expelled from school. On the day of the incident that led to their expulsions, one of the youths' moms called Troy Love, our Youth and Men's Coach, and the other youth's mom called me, our Youth and Family Life Coach. These parents trusted us enough that we were one of their first calls after being notified of their child's misconduct.

At first, other than continuing to love them and pray for them, The Ladder leadership was not sure how we could help. We prayed often, and we stayed in close contact with the parents. After a couple weeks of thoughtful consideration, intentional prayer, and meeting with our volunteers, we devised some ways to encourage and assist. It is important to us that we contribute to being a part of their journey in moving forward, doing everything in love, as the body of Christ is instructed to do (1 Corinthians 16:14).

The Ladder leadership and the parents of these youth agreed on a comprehensive plan, which included academics, community service, mentoring, discipleship, rides, and support with court proceedings. Additionally, we strategized a progressive path for the youth to return to The Huddle. It was important for the parents, the youth, and the Ladder staff to agree that all of this would be taken seriously. Everyone involved committed to putting forth every effort in doing the best they could. We also agreed that, if at any point the support plan was not adhered to, there would be consequences and accountability.

A team was identified and assigned various roles in supporting the youth and their families. I agreed to be the contact person overseeing the plan, as well as the one to lead in academics. A couple of volunteers and staff have offered up their time and knowledge to help with tutoring. Two other volunteers, who are parents of Huddle youth, gave their time and materials to help us homeschool. Additional volunteers and staff have dedicated their time to mentoring and discipling the youth and their moms. A handful of volunteers and staff have even provided rides for one family, since they do not have their own transportation. Two volunteers provided monetary support, which purchased homeschooling math curriculum for the youth. The staff and volunteers have also encouraged and supported the youth and their families by attending court proceedings with them. Shelby truly has wonderful people in the community who are caring, willing, and ready to spring into action. Hebrews 13:16 (ESV) says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." Sacrifices have been made by many, and much good has come of it. We can rest assured that God is pleased.

One youth's plan was set into motion in the middle of January. The other began in the middle of February. The process has not always been easy; however, the families, staff, and volunteers are all growing academically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. In fact, one of the youth has earned their return to The Huddle for one day a week. As long as the youth remains on target with their plan, next month's attendance at The Huddle will increase to three days a week, and then five days the next month. The final transition for this youth is expected to occur in May. The other youth is also eligible to return under these same increments and is working towards achieving these goals.

The engagement from The Ladder staff, our volunteers, the youth, their families, and of course our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has been instrumental in the success of these partnerships. It has been a blessing to watch and be a part of what God is doing at The Ladder. God is at work and He is moving mightily! Alliances have been made, trust has increased, families have been strengthened, and friendships have developed. Mutual respect has been established and maintained. Love—lots of love—has been given and received.

The success of all our children, youth, adults, and families is necessary to grow a safe, strong, and thriving community. God blesses each of us so that we may be a blessing to others. We are grateful for all the people and all the opportunities He puts before us. We are here to serve God and to serve our community. Praise God that, at The Ladder, we can teach academics as well as Bible lessons, and mentor and disciple the people God loves. It is only because of the Lord our God that amazing things happen at The Ladder!

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## Meal Program Update

By Michelle Deuling

Since May 2022, The Ladder has distributed meals to our community, provided by the Shelby Public School's kitchen.

The Ladder would appreciate all participants to contribute for each meal. We are especially grateful to those who give above and beyond to bless those who cannot pay the full amount.

As you can see in the chart below, we currently have a deficit of \$1,734.50 from the meals we served in January and February. If you would like to donate to our meal program, please visit [theladdercommunitycenter.com/give](http://theladdercommunitycenter.com/give) to view all our donation options.

If you would like to learn more about our meal program or view our current menu, please visit [theladdercommunitycenter.com/meals1](http://theladdercommunitycenter.com/meals1).

<b>NUMBER OF MEALS SERVED JAN - FEB 2024</b>	<b>922</b>
<b>COST OF MEALS (NOT INCLUDING COST OF SUPPLIES OR STAFFING)</b>	<b>\$2,766.00</b>
<b>AMOUNT COLLECTED FROM PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>\$1,031.50</b>
<b>AMOUNT STILL NEEDED TO COVER MEAL COST</b>	<b>\$1,734.50</b>

If you would like  
to sponsor a future  
newsletter, please  
contact Anne at  
**(231) 259-0211**

### Our Vision

*The Ladder is God's movement intent on mobilizing and equipping men, women, youth and children to bring the love of Jesus to every person and every home so that Oceana County is transformed in the name of Christ.*

# VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

# Cathy Towne

By Vicki Davey

If you come to The Ladder on Monday or Friday afternoons, you are sure to be greeted by Cathy Towne, who has been a volunteer here for the past four years. She was introduced to The Ladder after getting to know Brian Beckman, whom she met at the New Era Reformed Church several years ago. She began visiting The Ladder regularly, walking with a friend around the game area, and was impressed by the atmosphere of love and how the facility was managed. Shortly thereafter, she began as a volunteer. Coincidentally, she and Brian share a birthday, albeit in different years.

Although Cathy had always believed that God was a real presence in the world, she only began seeking a personal relationship with Him once she entered her forties. Since then she has embraced becoming intentional in her life and faith, putting her response to God's grace into action by using her talents and love of people to serve others. Beyond serving as a greeter at The Ladder, Cathy volunteers through Love INC to facilitate the Renew classes held at NERC. She is also active in the Kids Hope program, which was established in 2023 as a partnership between The Ladder and Shelby Elementary. Kids Hope pairs children with mentors who meet with them weekly for tutoring and guidance.

Cathy met her husband, Gerald Towne, while on the job at Plumb's Grocery in Whitehall. He was a specialty meat cutter there. They discovered a connection deeper than just the love of a good steak, and married 13 years ago. After Plumb's closed, Cathy went to work in home health, and spent seven

years working at the Pierogi Place in Mears. Her favorite pierogi was the mushroom and onion. Her husband continued to process meat, this time for Country Dairy, but after he required major heart surgery, they both retired.

Cathy and Gerry live quietly on the 40-acre family property where Gerry spent his childhood. His father relocated just down the hill when the couple moved back home. Cathy has an adult daughter who lives much further away, so the couple shares their home with their nine-year-old Australian shepherd, Cumin, and two clever and vocal cats, Miss Tiger and Nikki. She loves gardening and making her own baskets.

Going forward, Cathy says she plans to keep a positive attitude and continue to serve God and people. What a great example of living life to the fullest.



# OUR FRIENDS

# Gene Medacco

By Vicki Davey

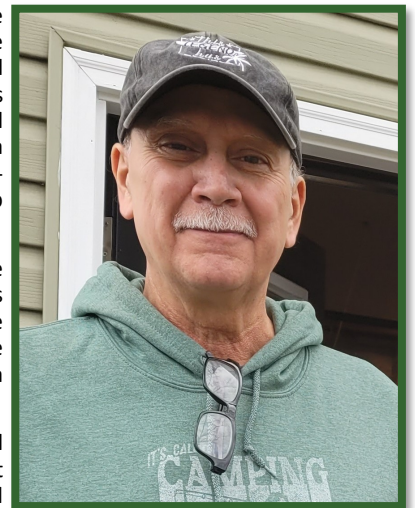
It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of January in 2023, and the air sparkled with the promise of anticipated freedom and fun. Gene had just retired from Howmet after 17 years of service. There he had labored to create the moulds that would be used to cast parts for jet engines. He had given his time to the company; now it was his turn to have some time for himself and Julie, his wife. Twelve days later, Gene was awakened in the middle of the night with the signs of an impending heart attack. In quick succession, he found himself admitted to the hospital and on his way to surgery. His heart's "widow maker" artery was 99% blocked, which was a shocking discovery, since he had never been diagnosed with any heart issues before this. Being suddenly confronted with the reality of our mortality would give anyone pause, but in Gene's case, it allowed him to relax and let God be in charge. Always secure in his belief of eternal life with God, he said the experience added a dimension of peace regarding the timing of when God calls us home.

Gene's life had taught him much about relying on God. As a child, his family moved often, and so things felt generally uncertain. There were so many things about which he had no control. But once schooling was finished and adulthood called, he found a place to call home in a Muskegon fixer-upper with a new bride named Julie. Soon the couple became blessed with a family, and over the years, two children have blossomed into an additional seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. They've moved only twice since that first Muskegon home, and now New Era is their dwelling place.

Gene's focus is on his health these days. After heart surgery, he chose to do rehab at the Ladder instead of spending hundreds of dollars going to a rehab facility. He still comes to The Ladder three days a week to use the exercise equipment as part of his routine to keep his heart in good shape.

For entertainment, he and Julie visit the region's antique auctions to buy, refresh, and resell the things that interest them. The most unique piece he recalls is a railroad velocipede.

Whether it's antiques or physical fitness, Gene's perspective is that you get out what you put in, and the same applies to your faith. "Look at what the Church needs from you," Gene said. That's the surest route to spiritual health.





**DONATION OPTIONS:**

- One time gift \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- I/We want to invest monthly:
  - \$100    \$50    \$25
  - \$10    \$5    \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to:  
*The Ladder Community Center  
or TLCC*

Address: 67 N. State Street, Shelby, MI 49455 PH: 231-259-0211  
Web: www.theladdercommunitycenter.com