

RAILS & RUNGS Newsletter

TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE

By Brian Beckman

Greetings from The Ladder! I am thankful to you for reading these newsletter articles and responding as the Lord leads you. We pray you are inspired to love Jesus and love your neighbor more and more each day. May we be able to communicate clearly the fruit produced by your investment in The Ladder, Oceana County, and the Kingdom of God. I share the following story to bring glory to God, as an example of the fruit he produces here at The Ladder.

Many people come through The Ladder doors, but few come back to praise God and to thank The Ladder, just like in the story of the 10 lepers in Luke 17.

Luke 17:15-16 (ESV)

Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving Him thanks.

At 8:00 a.m. on March 7, our greeter came to get me and said, "Brian, there is a man here; he needs your help." So, I came to the cafeteria to meet our visitor, whose name was Earl. Earl and I sat down together, and I listened to his story. He began with, "I need to get to Grand Rapids today. I can live in Grand Rapids in the homeless population, go to the shelter at night, get food and survive."

Then Earl told me that his ex-wife had just passed away in the Detroit area. He explained that his ex-father-in-law did not like him, so he had to leave the house. He had a prospective job offer in Traverse City, so he took his ex-wife's car and headed north. Along the way, he stopped at the Rothbury rest area. A police officer pulled into the rest stop also, and after running the license plate, identified the car as stolen. (Earl's ex-father-in-law had reported it stolen.) As a result, he ended up in the Oceana County Jail in Hart overnight. They released him at midnight the following day. As he started walking to Shelby, the police picked him up and dropped him off at Shelby Hospital. The hospital staff allowed him to sit in the lobby overnight, and in the morning they suggested he come to The Ladder.

After listening awhile, I said, "You must be hungry." Earl replied that he was, so I scrounged in our refrigerator to find some food to hold him over until the day's meals arrived for our adult meal program.

As our conversation progressed, Earl admitted he had strayed from Jesus because of an addiction. "I need to get to Grand Rapids this afternoon to check into a Christian program to overcome my addiction," he said. I believe after his encounter at The Ladder of being encouraged and given hope, Earl switched his desire from *surviving* in the homeless population to *growing* beyond his addiction into a life of freedom.

I called Mel Trotter in Grand Rapids but got an answering machine. Then I called Gateway Mission (formerly Holland Rescue Mission) and Teen Challenge, only to receive answering machines. Earl spent the rest of the morning drinking coffee, enjoying new Ladder friends, and eating lunch.

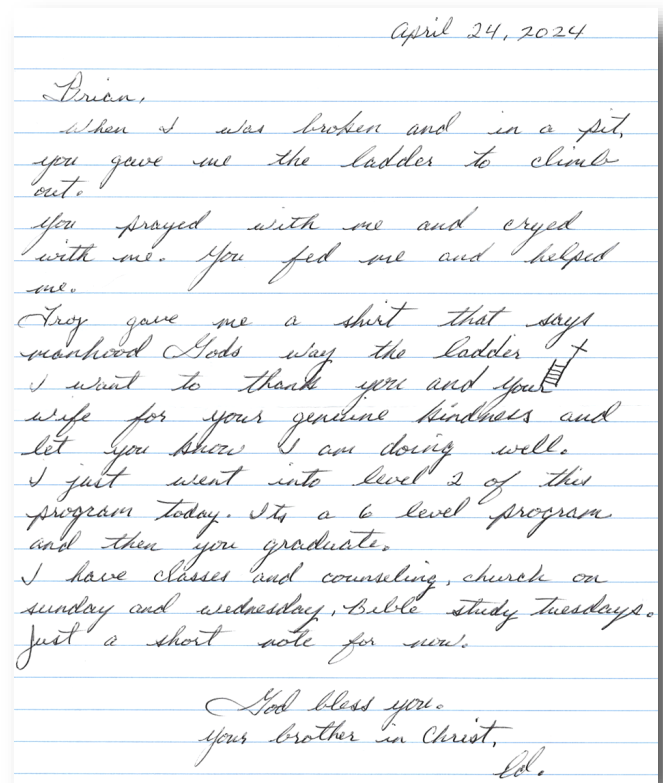
My wife Sue, The Ladder's wellness coach, came in later and spent some

time talking to Earl and helped him make more phone calls. At about 1:00, Earl made connection with another Christian treatment program, who told him he would need to be in Grand Rapids by 3:00 to begin the registration process. I called The Ladder's list of drivers, but no one was available to take him there.

Troy, our youth and men's coach, spent time with Earl as well, encouraging him to be courageous and be the man God called him to be. Troy even gave him a t-shirt.

After exhausting our list of drivers, Troy called his friend Bill, who said, "Yes, I will be there in 20 minutes!"

Nearly seven weeks had passed before we heard from Earl. He recently sent us the following letter:



God is moving! Earl was touched by the Holy Spirit while at The Ladder, which sent him on a different trajectory than he first thought as he walked into The Ladder. There are a few things people will encounter at The Ladder: loving people, food, prayer, help (if within our realm), honesty, and the Word of God. Earl received all of these.

Thank you for investing in The Ladder. God wants us to love all the people who walk through The Ladder doors (from Shelby and beyond) with an unconditional love—the love of Christ. You are helping us accomplish this goal. Praise God and praise you for your faithfulness!

YOUTH & FAMILY

God's Plan & Purpose at Work

By Mechele Martinez Gonzales

If you have read our previous newsletters or attended one of our Fam Fests, you know that God's Word is spoken, the opportunity for an encounter with Jesus is available, food is always on hand, and we meet friends who become family.

We experienced all of these and more at our Spring Fam Fest on March 18: *Rose, a mom of two of our youth, joined us for the first time, along with the rest of her children. We have been walking alongside this family for about two years. In early February, their apartment burned down and they lost everything. Things have not been pleasant for them, and building these relationships has not been easy. Though they continue to face many challenges, they now know they are loved, and they understand that they no longer need to battle life's trials and tribulations alone. Rose and I have gotten together many times over the last few months. Just recently she became comfortable enough to come into The Ladder. She has learned to trust us, and has been in to visit with us on several occasions.

It was encouraging to have a combination of 27 youth, children, their parents, and other family members come in to be celebrated. It was a pleasure for six staff members and 12 volunteers to serve and celebrate our guests. It was a blessing to share the good news and celebrate Jesus Christ with them.

We planned this entire event upon God's Word. We wanted others to see how life before Jesus is very different. Coach Love shared a devotion talking about how life can be dark, dreary, and full of sin. He explained how a life walking with Jesus may still be challenging; however, there are big differences—good differences. Jesus turns our brokenness to joy, our stress to peace, our darkness to light, and our anxiety to hope. Because of what Jesus has done for us, the dreariness of this world is overtaken by God's glorious promises to us, reflected in the rainbows He sends after storms in our lives.

Genesis 9:13 (NASB)

I have set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall serve as a sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.

1 Peter 5:10 (ESV)

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

After a delicious taco dinner, families created crafts based on the goodness of God and His blessings. We also played a game using the Noah's ark background, which we put up for taking pictures as a part of the game. Each person had a picture of an animal clipped to their back. Once they found the individual with the matching animal, the couple were then able to board the Ark. Later, every child and youth in the building took turns hitting a piñata. When it finally broke open, everyone (even some adults) took part in grabbing the candy that scattered on the floor. The fellowship was wonderful and will remain a good memory. Afterward, each family posed for a polaroid photo, which they took home as a memento of their fun evening together.

Amazing things happen at The Ladder, and lives are being changed. Most often the LORD our God brings people together when situations and circumstances are hard. We need to thank God that He will use the not-so-good things in our lives as a way to bring His will (better things) into our lives. He does it all for His glory. At The Ladder, we want others to know Jesus, and we want everyone to turn towards Him and His ways.

Romans 8:28 (ESV)

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.



Young and old dove to the floor when the piñata burst open!



This little blessing is Rose's youngest child who, at four months old, is the youngest so far to attend a Fam Fest at The Ladder.

*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.

An Old Man's Dreams Coming True

By Troy Love

ACTS 2:17

And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

In a day when it seems like dreams are being shattered, I want you to know that this old man's dreams are coming true. I have a dream that God's Spirit is moving and is raising up a generation of young men who love and honor God, His Word and His Son Jesus. I have a dream of older men pouring into younger men and inspiring them to be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong, and let everything they do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)



All year I have met with a group of young men after school every Thursday at Shelby Middle School. We call ourselves the Men of Honor. This year we focused on the biblical command to honor authority. It has been powerful to hear these young men pray at each meeting for their principal. The praying led to honoring her with written letters and prayers and even providing her with her favorite snack throughout the year. These young men caught a vision of honor that affected their school. Would you like to have young men in your community like this? It's a dream coming true!

To prophesy means to share the testimony of Jesus. What a thrill it is to see young people stepping up to share and teach Jesus. I wish you could have been there when a 15-year-old named Landon taught at The Huddle one day. Every youth and adult were gripped as he taught us about how "God made us in His image, for a purpose, and it's no mistake that you were put on earth at this time." I wish everyone

could have been at one Tuesday night Pit Stop when another 15-year-old, Alex, testified for ten minutes in front of 25 HERO men about his desire to be a man like David—a man after God's own heart. These are our sons who are sharing Jesus. It's a dream coming true!

At another Pit Stop, seven young men stood with hands open, receiving the blessing and prayers from dozens of older HERO men who are encouraging and supporting the next generation of HERO men in our community. It's a dream coming true!

I know I'm not the only one who has high hopes and dreams for the future of our community and nation. I am so grateful for The Ladder and all who support it. It is a movement that is making scripture come to life. I see our sons and daughters prophesying, young men having visions, and old men's dreams coming true!



Young men receiving a blessing from a couple dozen HERO men.

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.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Meal Program Update

By Michelle Deuling

God is so good and so faithful! We are thanking Him for the faithful donor that gave above and beyond our reported deficit (\$1,734.50) from January and February with a gift of \$2,000. As you can see in the chart below, our current deficit as of April 30 is \$1,746.50.

We would also like to express our gratitude for every single one of you that gave a donation to the adult meal program in March and April! We thank God that we are able to continue offering nutritious meals and for those of you who continue to pray for us.

If you would like to learn more about our meal program or view our current menu, please visit theladdercommunitycenter.com/meals1.

JANUARY—APRIL	
NUMBER OF MEALS SERVED	1,909
COST OF MEALS (NOT INCLUDING COST OF SUPPLIES OR STAFFING)	\$5,727
COLLECTED FROM PARTICIPANTS	\$1,980.50
TOTAL DEFICIT	\$3,746.50
SPECIAL DONATIONS RECEIVED	\$2,000
AMOUNT STILL NEEDED TO COVER MEAL COSTS	\$1,746.50

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Mike Shockey

By Vicki Davey

If cruising through life is an actual thing, it can't be more real than in the life of Mike Shockey. In fact, Mike even met his wife Deborah while cruising the boulevard in his hometown of Defiance, OH. Not one to let a good thing drive on past, he married her in October of 1973. They had two daughters, who in turn gave them two grandchildren, and now a great-grandchild.

Not too long after high school graduation, Mike went to work for GM and became a millwright, keeping the plant running at top efficiency for 45 years until his retirement in 2017. It was a job where he honed valuable skills and which also gave him the resources to fully engage in his passion for Jeeps and dunes.

Although Defiance was where they made their home, the call of the dunes was hard for Mike to ignore. What began as an annual pilgrimage with family and friends to the Silver Lake area in order to run the dunes, became so much more over time. Forty years and 60 successive Jeeps later, they now live year-round in Silver Lake, not far from Mac Wood's Dune Rides. Now they can watch the scooters come and go throughout the summer months.

Offering a helping hand is a way of life for Mike. He is frequently doing miscellaneous tasks in and around Silver Lake for the community. Mike first heard about The Ladder when he attended a lecture breakfast given by Trinity Lutheran Church. As it happened, Brian Beckman and Troy Love were the speakers that morning, and they shared about how The Ladder strives to serve the community and the vision they have for the area. At the end of the meeting, Mike walked over to Brian and handed him a donation.

This planted a seed in Mike's mind that eventually led him to cruise by The Ladder to see what he could do to help. He now serves snacks and meals to the youth two days a week. He is especially attuned to the youths' dietary needs, bringing in fruit for those who choose not to eat refined sugar. Mike feels a sense of satisfaction joining in the effort to guide these young folks.

So, if you should cruise on by the kitchen on a Monday or Friday afternoon, stop and say hello to this very friendly guy. You'll be glad you did.



OUR FRIENDS

Vera Huls

By Vicki Davey

In the simpler days when community spirit was bright and alive in Shelby and Benona, Vera Johnsen made her debut in the world. Kept company by three sisters and three brothers, Vera laughed, played, learned, and worshiped near her home. It was during a playful time while Vera was a high school student that her sister Leona and her friend met up with some lads at a dance in Rothbury. One particular boy caught Vera's eye, and she declared, "I'm going to marry that one." That prophecy came to fruition two years later in 1959 when she became Mrs. Wesley Huls. They settled near Marshville Dam, raising four children together. Although Wes passed away at age 52 in 1986, his legacy lives on in the many grandchildren he and Vera have together.


With her children grown, Vera kept busy working as an aide to the teachers of Benona elementary. She then moved to working in the lunchroom at the old Shelby High School, and from there to New Era Elementary School where she single-handedly ran the lunchroom for the school.

Vera left Michigan for Grand Junction, CO, when she remarried a man whose work required that location. Only seven years later however, she found herself widowed again and yearning for the comforts of home. Shelby called and she answered. During this gray time, a little color seemed to be just what the doctor ordered, and Vera's creative side took hold. She began painting pots for her garden, and soon her hobby flourished into a passion.

Vera has shared her gift for serving lunch, making people feel welcome, and teaching her painting techniques to the people of The Ladder, first as a volunteer and then later as a friend. Now you will find Vera and her friend Maxine at The Ladder on Thursday mornings, as they try their luck at Bingo.

Vera has passed through dark days and broken through into a life awash with color and vitality. She still teaches painting out of her home and relishes the pleasure it brings. Sometimes it's the simple things in life that bring the most joy.





The LADDER
COMMUNITY CENTER

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The Ladder Community Center
or TLCC

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