

CHAT ROOM

Mary Rodrigue

You, too, can 'Make A Difference'

Saturday is national Make A Difference Day, an official day dedicated to volunteering for the betterment of the communities in which we live.

In the Farmington area, Mercy High School students, including the varsity basketball team and coaches, are meeting at their school to drive together to a house in inner-city Detroit to paint it. It's part of an on-going, non-profit housing rehabilitation project, taking former gang-infested homes, now vacant, and rehabilitating them for poor families.

For the past month, middle school kids in the Farmington Families In Action after-school program have been involved in project Blizzard Buddies, collecting coats, sweaters, hats, scarves and mittens for the Pontiac Rescue Mission. On Saturday, they will team up with Miss Farmington/Oakland County and her court, the Farmington Elks, local Scout troops and the Marines to box the goods and deliver them.

Dozens of other projects are under way across Michigan and the country.

So what are you doing on Saturday? Watching college football? Baking the leaves? Whether doing chores or enjoying a leisurely pastime, could you squeeze in an hour, a half hour, or even a few minutes to do something nice for somebody else?

We all get caught up in the minutia of life - go to work, do the grocery shopping, take out the garbage, walk the dog, pay the bills - and then start the whole process all over again.

Little effort goes long way

There are some projects that take little time or effort. Starbucks Coffee in the Downtown Farmington Center has a drop-off box for collecting used children's books. The Salvation Army in Farmington Hills accepts used clothing. Call 477-1153 for pick-up or drop-off information. These types of endeavors require little effort.

Have a bit more time on your hands? The Meals on Wheels program operating out of the Costick Activities Center desperately needs drivers and packers for its noontime meal program for homebound senior citizens. A two-hour commitment once a week is all that's required.

If your Saturday is already spoken for, consider Make A Difference Day a gentle reminder. We often think of helping less fortunate people at Thanksgiving or during the Christmas season, but the reality is that people in need are with us 365 days a year. Our involvement can be as large or small as we want to make it.

If groups or foundations seem too daunting, there are myriad things that can be accomplished on a more personal level. Give an elderly neighbor a hand with yard work. Call a lonely or grieving friend or relative just to talk - or listen. Bring dinner to a sick friend or a new mom. Pick up litter in your neighborhood. Better yet, enlist a group of kids to join you in picking up litter.

The most vibrant senior citizens I've ever met are the ones who spend hours doing things such as reading to kids in classrooms or holding hands with dying people in hospice care. The most amazing middle school and high school kids I've had the pleasure of knowing are those who stretch themselves at what is normally an incredibly self-centered time in life to reach out to others by serving meals in soup kitchens or visiting senior citizens in nursing homes.

While, sadly, the real world rarely leaves us feeling fulfilled or appreciated these days, volunteer efforts make us feel better about ourselves. It's the little things like the smile on someone's face or the heartfelt thank-you from a person or agency representative.

So whether it's this Saturday or a week from Saturday, make a difference in someone's life. You'll be glad you did.

Mary Rodrigue is the Community Life editor of the Farmington Observer.

Mom's group prays for students

Moms In Touch International is an interdenominational ministry dedicated to praying for kids in schools.



BY KATHIE O'DONOHUE
STAFF WRITER

In the wake of events such as the Columbine High School tragedy, many parents are wringing their hands wondering what can be done while others are throwing theirs up in frustration.

But for some Farmington area moms, the answer is to fold their collective hands and pray for their children and their schools.

A group called "Moms in Touch International" (MITI) began in British Columbia in 1984 by Fern Nichols, now of Poway, Calif., who believed her children's schools desperately needed prayer. Apparently numerous other mothers agreed with Nichols since the group has spread to 85 countries and currently has over 32,000 groups worldwide.

MITI is an interdenominational ministry organization for moms of public school, private school and home school students from preschool through college. These women meet one hour a week to pray for their children's schools. The group's goal is for every school in the U.S. to be represented by praying moms by the year 2003.

MITI Michigan coordinator Janice Oldham of Brighton has been involved with the organization for 11 years and relates that a recent national radio broadcast generated even greater interest in the group.

"There are 4,392 schools in Michigan and over 1,000 MITI groups. Prior to the August radio broadcast, there were 900. We've had hundreds of calls since the broadcast."

MITI has experienced rapid expansion



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRADLEY

Prayerful Wendy Sanders, Janelle Ringger, Susan Nichols, Mary Betley and Jenny Durant gather for prayer in Farmington Hills.

and development since its grassroots origins. Internationally, there are six different country coordinators who facilitate the development and running of groups in 14 languages.

On a more local level, MITI volunteers fill elite as state and regional coordinators, area coordinators, and local contact people who maintain a roster of current groups as well as direct interested moms to the appropriate group or assist them in starting one where indicated.

Praying in private homes

MITI groups pray for the schools, not

in them, and in fact maintain very strict guidelines preventing "advertising" of any sort on public school property. It is primarily through word of mouth and radio broadcasts that mothers learn about MITI. Groups meet in private homes and require strict confidentiality: what's prayed for in the group stays in the group.

Oldham says much of the heightened interest in collective prayer of this nature is due to violence in the schools. "None of us are immune. Fear and uncertainty drive a lot of moms to pray," she says.

"MITI takes a positive approach,"

Oldham says. "We have wonderful teachers and we want to support them. We don't ask anything of the school, but teachers who find out about and are interested in the ministry and have prayer requests are welcome to call the group, but they keep it private, no names, etc."

"We pray for big things and little things, too. We pray for God's character to be developed in our children."

For an hour on Wednesday mornings, Farmington Hills mother of three Mary Betley meets with other moms to pray for three schools: Hillside, O.E.

Please see PRAYER, B2

Hip to Halloween

Pokemon to Billy Bob teeth are hot commodities



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRADLEY

In costume: Above, Halloween USA manager Katy Hazel models the popular and grueome-looking Billy Bob teeth. Left, Farmington Hills brothers Kyle Kirschner, 6, as a Power Ranger, and D.J. Kirschner, 8, as a Star Wars character.

BY MARY RODRIGUE
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It's a world of yellowed rotten teeth and Pokemon characters at Halloween USA in Farmington Hills.

That is, if the merchandise can stay in stock long enough. "Some of these things are flying off the shelves," said Sherril Raymond, assistant manager of the store on Orchard Lake Road south of Fourteen Mile. "The Billy Bob teeth are flying off the shelves like Bonnie Babes."

She said it's the adults who are buying the shrink-wrapped disgusting teeth while kids love the bright Pokemon costumes.

"Little boys like to try on the wrestling outfits, but not buy them," she added. Perhaps it's the Jesse Ventura influence. The wrestling selection includes a variety of world championship belts, facial masks, muscular body suits and fake blood.

Longer lines

"The lines are getting longer now," said Raymond. "I hope people will be patient. If they tell me what they want to be, if they don't see it, I can mix and match and create new outfits."

The selection of costumes seems overwhelming at first glance. From capes to clown alley, eye masks to gloves and stockings. Wigs, hair spray and accessories are everywhere.

And so are the costumes. There are black and white ninjas, big round comfy-looking lady bugs, honey bees, M&Ms and pumpkins. Along another wall is the ever popular grim reaper, Knight-Slayer, bleeding scream stalker, and Freddie Krueger's bloody hand from "Nightmare on Elm Street."

If nightmares aren't all that appalling, how about the Billy Bobs? Doughty, the Cat in the Hat, or Furby? Little girls might like I Dream of Jeannie, Fairy Tale Princess, Barbie, Teeny Bopper or a Team Up 'A' member in patriotic red, white and blue. Or maybe the red-headed Angelica from Nickelodeon's Rugrats cartoon.

"Pokemon and the Scream Stalker are selling like wildfire," one stock worker said. "Star Wars is also a big seller. Little kids still like to be clowns or Superman. And Batman and Robin remain a popular duo - so popular,

that they're still in demand on Make A Difference Day. "It's a huge house," Atchinson said. "I think there's 15 rooms. The girls will be priming and probably putting on the first coat of paint."

Another team of volunteers has already cleaned the walls, which were covered with gang graffiti.

"I'm going because I haven't been involved with service much," admitted Nickie Downing, a senior. "I was inspired by a ted Eleanor Josantia gave here recently during a school assembly on poverty."

Josantia is co-founder of Detroit's

Please see MERCY, B3

Mercy cadre will paint the town Saturday

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER

For the 10th year in a row, a group of Mercy High School students will be participating in the national Make A Difference Day on Saturday.

Varsity basketball team members and their coaches are among the 25 Mercy representatives who will roll up their sleeves and pick up paint brushes to help transform a large 1930s-style house near Detroit City Airport into a livable home for a poor family.

It's part of the St. Ignace Nonprofit Housing Corporation effort to rebuild a neighborhood near Connor and Gratiot on the city's east side one block at a time. Old houses, once a haven for junkies and gangs, are finding a new life by providing shelter for needy families after major renovations are completed. The corporation has completed six houses, mostly farm colonias with big porches, and has just started on a new block.

Bruce Rober, a senior and Mercy basketball player, said she thought the experience would be a good opportunity to bond with the team outside of school and also make us feel good about helping people in need.

Alexandria Marshall, a freshman, liked the idea of "helping out the com-

munity. And it's the best way to get bonding and community service at the same time."

Mercy students must complete 25 hours of community service as a graduation requirement. Pat Atchinson, the school's volunteer coordinator, points out that many of the seniors who will be painting on Saturday have already exceeded the 25 hour requirement.

"I liked Mrs. A's recruiting skills," teased Brooke Stein, a junior. "It will definitely be good bonding for the team, and an opportunity to get in the community service."

Carmen Krystinink, a senior, just liked the idea of doing something posi-

tive on Make A Difference Day.

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