

Skill-swap programs tap talents, build relationships

By GINA DAMRON
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The tough economic climate is the driving factor in the growing interest among metro Detroiters to swap services with their neighbors for free.

Kim Hodge — co-founder of the Lathrup Village TimeBank, a neighborhood skill-exchange program — has been meeting with interested citizens and organizations around the state for nearly a year, but said the momentum has picked up in the past six months.

The trend is reflected nationwide. TimeBanks USA has received an average of 18 requests per month for start-up kits this year, up from an average of eight requests per month in 2008, said founder and co-chair Edgar Cahn.

“We all think we have to live on our own,” Hodge said. “I just don’t think we can do that anymore.”

In recent months, she helped launch the MI Alliance of TimeBanks, which will help form local groups across the

state. There are several residents, organizations and churches interested and thinking about creating time banks, or skill-exchange programs, in metro Detroit now, Hodge said. She estimates there are about 20 potential start-ups.

This includes a group in Sterling Heights, which resident Janet Johnson hopes to get started within the next three months. It’s “a way for people in a difficult economy to fight back,” said Johnson, who lost her job in March. “To be able to get the services that they need using other people’s strengths.”

How it works

Time banks allow residents to share services such as sewing, gardening, painting, transportation, child care and window installation. Typically, members will go to the group’s Web site to post skills they can contribute, as well as needs they have.

For every hour members volunteer a skill, they bank an



RASHAUN RUCKER/Detroit Free Press

Dan Gilleran opens paint in the basement of his Lathrup Village home Oct. 10. A neighbor skilled in painting tackled that part of the project.

hour, which is used to have something done for them. Hodge said Web site coordinators can monitor hours as they’re shifted from one person’s bank to another as needs are fulfilled.

But time banks aren’t exclusive to neighborhoods — the Michigan Department of Corrections is considering the concept. The department is think-

ing about starting a program for recently released prisoners to help make use of their skills as they re-enter society, spokesman Russ Marlan said.

Michigan and Washington, D.C., are the first two prison systems TimeBanks USA is working with to implant such a program. If the program is employed, it could be incorporated into parole conditions and

Learn more online

For information about time banks, go to TimeBanks USA’s Web site at www.timebanks.org or to the MI Alliance of TimeBanks at www.mitimebanks.org.

TimeBanks USA provides starter kits, which, for \$65, include a how-to manual and a 6-month trial of computer software that allows users to post services they can provide and what needs they have.
Source: TimeBanks USA

allow released prisoners to earn hours that can be put toward job-training or expenses, Marlan said.

“They’re coming out with limited resources,” he said. But they “have talents and abilities.”

Sense of community

Time banks are flourishing most in neighborhoods.

When Lathrup Village resident Dan Gilleran needed his basement repainted, neighbor Frank Selinsky — a self-pro-

fessed neat, but slow, painter — stepped up.

“He’s busy; he’s working,” Selinsky, 62, said, of Gilleran. “I’m not.”

Along with getting help with her résumé and receiving a massage, Hodge and her partner, Tom Brodzik, also have made friends.

“We have a group that we play cards with or games with every month or so,” Hodge said. “The things that I was looking for in my community, I now have.”

Pastor Tim Larson of Peace Lutheran Church in Southfield wants to establish a sense of community in a neighborhood off 13 Mile between Greenfield and Evergreen and hopes a time bank could help.

Larson is working to have a program up and running by December for residents in that area of Southfield and Beverly Hills. “A time bank would provide a needed service,” Larson said. Some, he added, “don’t have cash, but they may have time.”