

Bank pays dividends by building community

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From the Observer-Eccentric

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LATHRUP VILLAGE — What do you need? What can you offer? Those are the key questions at the heart of every TimeBank. Typically an all-volunteer organization, a TimeBank helps to build community connections as each member spends time doing something that other members need help with.

“I might cook for you and you might teach someone's child how to read and that person might take somebody fishing, so it's not barter between two, but exchanging time between a whole group of people,” said Kim Hodge, founder of the Michigan Alliance of TimeBanks and a Kitchen Cabinet board member of the Lathrup Village TimeBank.

“It's based on core values that everybody has something to offer, that we all have needs, that we need to operate around respect and that we value each other,” she added.

Each hour of service equals one time-dollar, so to speak. TimeBank members build up their “currency” to purchase services from others.

Individuals, couples, families and organizations belong to TimeBanks, of which there are several in Michigan. A computer [database](#) lists each member's profile, including things that are needed (window washing, a ride to the airport) and things that the member can offer (lawn mowing, violin lessons). Sometimes a broker or matchmaker will help facilitate those connections.

“There's no requirement that you must participate ‘X’ amount of hours,” Hodge said. “One hour is one hour, no matter who you are and what you do. A child's hour of picking dandelions out of my yard is the same as a chiropractor who gives me an adjustment.”

Hodge pointed out that some people don't think that they have anything to offer.

“The fact that someone is talking to me is a skill that you might think is not valuable, but we have a member in our TimeBank whose husband has Alzheimer's, and she just needs someone to sit and talk with him while she does Christmas cards or cleans the house,

because she can't be with him every minute of the day," she said. "Even just sitting and having patience and being present with someone is of value."

Community projects

A Kitchen Cabinet member of the Royal Oak/Huntington Woods TimeBank, Nancy Chinn was initially unsure of what she could offer. Then last year about this time, she volunteered with other TimeBank members at a rabies vaccination clinic sponsored by the Royal Oak Department of Public Services.

"We actually helped to vaccinate 150 pets. I met so many wonderful people who had adopted pets that had been abandoned," she said. "I began to see it's not just about the individual helping the individual, it's about members helping the community."

Chinn is looking forward to volunteering at an upcoming bike clinic and a prescription drug disposal effort with the Royal Oak Community Coalition, a member organization of the TimeBank. Her posts in the database include an offer of rides to and from the airport.

"I've also posted that I will be a second set of hands for your party to do the cleanup and just make sure that things are tidy as it's going along, so whoever is hosting it can actually have fun. Those are the two things I know how to do," she said, laughing.

One of the most meaningful ways that Chinn has spent her TimeBank hours was to help a dear friend whose job had been eliminated and who needed advice on whether to take a lower paid position, or a "not very big buyout" from the company.

"We had one member who is an elder law attorney, so she worked with my friend to look over papers they had sent her. We have another member who is a therapist, and she agreed to work with her on finances, what was her best game plan," Chinn said. "With these two people, meeting with them individually, my friend figured out she would be just fine no matter what happened."

Sharing your gifts

The Southfield Area Friends and Neighbors TimeBank is centered at Peace Lutheran Church in Southfield. The Rev. Tim Larson said the group is in a "holding pattern," and needs someone who has the time to organize the database and to reach out to others.

“It's like building a community and that doesn't happen overnight,” he said, noting that the TimeBank is something the church is doing as a service for the neighborhood, and includes a garden project.

“A TimeBank does connect people socially and that is something we really need, especially in the diverse neighborhood where our church is situated in,” the pastor said. “Not only are we a suburban community where everybody works and then comes home and they shut the garage door and they watch TV or get on the Internet, it's not only that kind of barrier, but we're different, culturally, religiously and in many ways.”

Larson would like to find a grant to fund a part-time person to run the TimeBank, or a passionate volunteer who will get out and talk to neighbors about the program.

“It's a wonderful way to bring a diverse community together by sharing your gifts with one another,” he said.

“It's about rethinking ... how to we interact with our neighbors and do we even know our neighbors,” Hodge added. “TimeBank is really a tool. How can we use this tool to fill our needs and society's challenges at the same time?”

Members of the Royal Oak/ Huntington Woods TimeBank will give a presentation on the service exchange program at 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 8, at the Royal Oak Public Library. Register at ropi.org or call (249)246.3727. Contact the Michigan Alliance of TimeBanks at www.mitimebanks.org.