

**EAST SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS DAY EVENTS PROMOTE COMMUNITY, FEATURE BACK TO SCHOOL FESTIVALS,  
CALL FOR SUPPORT FOR SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD PROGRAMS**

**By M. LAPHAM**

**ARISE Detroit! Special Writer**

**BUILDING COMMUNITY AT SOLOMON'S TEMPLE CHURCH**

If you drove along Seven Mile on August 3, just before reaching Pershing High School, you found yourself passing by signs that asked if they could pray for you.

If you got out and decided to investigate, you indeed would find people willing to pray for you, and even welcoming you to prayer circles. However, despite the location and friendly conversations ending in a cheery and earnest about God and the importance of community, usually ending in a cheery and earnest “have a blessed day,” it was not simply a revival.

Kindness reigned. During the early hours of the event there was a point when a gust of wind blew a few vendor canopies over, and there was a rush of parishioners to help.

“(Their goal is to) bring the church and community together,” says organizer Darcel Bolling.

There was a bounce house behind the church for kids to have fun, right next to free hot dogs and water for those in need of either one on a hot Detroit August day.

There were also vendors lined up to sell mostly homemade items. Many of the homemade goods were fashion-based, but there were also handmade desserts to enjoy after you finished your hotdog.

The dessert vendor brought her aunt to help set up shop and sell her beauty supplies next to her homemade sweets.

All of this was set up on the edges of the church's connected parking lot with the blacktop clear. If you came around at the right time, you would have seen volunteers washing cars.

This was the ninth straight of Neighborhoods Day participation by the church.

**RECALLING BLACK HISTORY AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

On top of the underground railroad, the First Congressional Church on Woodward is an important part of history, one it shared with those stopping by on Neighborhood's Day.

After showing them a quick documentary, a guide took visitors on a tour, reenacting what it was like to be on the run, desperate to cross stateliness to freedom.

“It is a necessity to the Black experience to reflect back on our past,” said Wendy Morris, the parishioner who helped organize the event.

One parishioner dressed up as famed abolitionist John Brown ... complete with a scraggly fake beard ... to give people a greater understanding of the issues those fleeing.

The tour is not unique to Neighborhoods Day, but the church did somethings special for the day.

Those arriving early enough saw a libation ritual, which traces back to Africa. During the ritual, liquid is poured out to honor those who came before. In this case, the guides poured out water in front of a portrait of Harriet Tubman, who escaped to freedom in the North in 1849. She became the most famous "conductor" on the Underground Railroad and risked her life to lead hundreds of family members and other slaves to freedom. While she never came to Michigan, Tubman seemed to act as a stand in for all those who used the Underground railroad.

There were also African storytellers, musicians, and an African fashion show.

And, of course, it is the Midwest, so food was plentiful. There were vendors sure, but the big draw was the food made from scratch in the church kitchen.

### **SHOWCASING THE CITY: DETROIT PUBLIC LIBRARY MAIN BRANCH**

Detroit Public Library used Neighborhoods Day to act as a card catalog, by showing off things available in the city. Organizer Jessica Bostian brought in businesses and organizations from across the city to show off what Detroit has to offer.

"Detroit has so much to offer," said Bostian. "We want to connect people with some of the amazing existing services and organizations that can enrich their lives."

One of the big groups to show up was ProjectArt. Volunteers taught those who stopped by the basic sewing skills they would need to work on the community quilt they are making. Each square is in memory of someone who has died in the past five years.

Kids loved the Friends of Detroit Animal Care and Control, which brought several adoptable dogs.

Other groups attending the event included the Detroit Science Center, which showed off some of its science projects, and Detroit Reconnect, which helps adults with college and job training.

There were also book giveaways, and information on the resources available at the library.

More than anything, Bostian just wants people to spread the word about the city's resources.

### **FUN FOR KIDS AT LITTLE DETROIT COMMUNITY GARDEN**

Organizer Loretta Powell is a preschool teacher in her day job, so it is no surprise her goal was to provide good clean fun for kids. One of her students even showed up.

There was a place to play basketball, jump rope, and she even brought out hula hoops. The kid's hula hooped to music provided by Powell's granddaughter.

The Detroit Pistons donated basketballs, which the kids got to take home.

The kids also enjoyed playing in the garden, especially when the bubbles were brought out.

"Building a relationship with people is so important to me," Powell said. "I am so excited when I participate because Neighborhoods Day gives me an opportunity to continue to enjoy and build a stronger relationship with my family, my neighbors and my community. We have unity in our community."

When Detroit Councilwoman, Latisha Johnson stopped by, Powell used the time and the event to talk about getting more resources for the neighborhood.

## **BACK TO SCHOOL WITH GRACED TO GROW**

Graced to Grow owner Kelley Duren-Jones held a back-to-school giveaway to help local families prepare for the upcoming school year, along with a few hygiene products like a toothbrush and toothpaste.

This was not a dry, pick up and leave affair. She planned the whole Neighborhoods Day around it.

There was a coloring table, a bounce house, an ice cream truck, and music. But what the kids most responded to was the firetruck. While always a favorite for kids, spraying water on such a hot and humid day made it extra exciting.

There was also a table with activities for autistic kids. In addition, parents with autistic children could get information on working with their children provided by Duren-Jones's sister, who works with autistic children.

There was also a place to help kids struggling with anxiety.

The day was a success with more than 500 people attending. Not a bad showing for Duren-Jones second Neighborhoods Day.

Durren-Jones said, "we just want them to know that there is someone who cares."

## **SCHOOL BACKPACK FESTIVAL AT FORD COMMUNITY CENTER-EAST**

The Ford Community Center-East spent the day getting kids and parents ready to go back to school by giving away backpacks to ease the ever-expanding cost of school supplies.

There were free haircuts for kids, which can build up in cost quite quickly when you have more than one child.

There were also health screenings, accountancy services and other local groups. In addition, Gleaners Community Food Bank gave away more than 200 boxes of food.

The day was not only about the practical.

There were video games for the kids to play, and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra did a couple of pop-up shows that each lasted 15 minutes.

## **PCPB FOREVER HONORING OUR ANCESTORS**

For Neighborhoods Day, Don Phillips of the group PCPB FOREVER decided to work with his usual basketball group of 25-30 men to honor their ancestors.

Fueled by the recent loss of Phillips' sister, the group got together and reflected on the importance and impact their ancestors had on their lives. In this case, ancestors did not mean people who lived hundreds of years ago, but parents, family members, or even those in the community who helped guide them through life.

Each man chose an ancestor and wrote a message to him or her. Some decided to read their messages aloud but given the emotional nature it was not mandatory. Phillips chose to leave his message up on a board for those interested to read.

It read, "Wow! You were truly a blessing from God. Your love, wisdom, and caring and love for us, our neighborhood and community. I can't explain how much I miss you. I am truly blessed because you poured into me. Miss you now and forever."

His message was written to his mother, thanking her for not only the love and wisdom she gave him, but how she spread that love and wisdom around the community.

The group signed a pledge to honor their ancestors and work as an example to the community.

### **BUILDING HARMONY WITH THE BRIDGING THE GAP WALK**

Lynn Young likes to run, but years ago she realized there were not many runners in Detroit. Sure, it was common in the suburbs, but she did not notice many runners in the city.

To try to interest more Detroiters she started a running program several years ago, which viewed Neighborhoods Day as a great way to get people into the city. The program is called Bridging The Gap Riverfront Walk and Run ' and takes place along the Detroit River..

“The whole purpose is to was to promote relationships in surrounding neighborhoods like the city and suburbs,” Young said.

This year was a bit of a coming home. It was the first time the event had been held since COVID. Young wanted to make sure the risk was gone before she started up again.

There was something for experienced marathon runners or someone who liked the idea of exercise but has gym class flashbacks. There was the option of a 10k, 5k or 1 mile run/walk to accommodate various skill levels.

Running is not Young’s only passion spotlighted on Neighborhoods Day. She used it to raise awareness of human trafficking. Her website encourages donations to Sanctum House, a charity that helps victims of human trafficking.

She said her long-term goal is to use her races to promote more charities that combat that problem.

### **PROMOTING PEACE AT THE CHURCH OF THE MESSIAH**

The Church of the Messiah Episcopal Church, located on East Grand Blvd. near the Belle Isle Bridge, had a meeting to discuss how to combat violence in the city. After a neighborhood block party shooting in early July, Rev. Barry Randolph felt this discussion was imperative.

Young people came to the church, not just those in the congregation, but their friends and those who have influence in the neighborhood. He sat with them and discussed ways to help combat the violence.

The conversations became deep and started discussing elements like mental health, and how it relates to living in Detroit and other cities. The social workers in attendance gave tips on how to spot people with mental health issues, such as bipolar disorder and depression, and how to engage them.

“We’re peace makers not peace keepers,” Randolph said. “Because peace makers go into the chaos to make the peace.”

There was also discussion about why the young people felt a need to gather in locations where incidents occur such as the recent increase in drag races.

After the conversations were done, the group cleaned up the neighborhood around the church to get hands-on work and decompress after an hour of heavy conversation.

One thing that became clear was that this was not going to be a one-day solution. This group of peacemakers have dedicated themselves to meeting once a month. Randolph stressed they are peacemakers, not peacekeepers, since their goal is to go into chaotic areas and make peace happen.

### **SEEKING PEACEFUL SOLUTIONS WITH BLACK FAMILY DEVELOPMENT**

Moved by the recent shootings and killings at block parties, Derek Blackmon used his organization, Black Family Development, to hold a peace meeting at the Heilmann Recreation Center.

There were social workers present to talk to kids and families and give advice. Police officers came and explained the rules and regulations for block parties to hopefully prevent things from getting out of control again.

Prevention ultimately comes down to those in the community, participants said. To try and find answers those attending broke into three large circles to discuss the shooting, everything going on around it, what led to it and how to prevent it from happening again.

The day was dedicated to fostering respect for each other and the community. Blackmon expressed his optimism when he said, "that community is very resilient."