**DETROIT’ WEST SIDE ON NEIGHBORHOODS DAY: HELPING CHILDREN, SCHOOL SUPPLY GIVEAWAYS, URBAN FARMING**

**By Deb Seaton**

**Special for ARISE Detroit!**

**Ike Blessi**tt might be a familiar name for some older Detroit Tigers fans.

Blessitt, a retired Detroit Tiger, and professional hitting instructor, said he is the only former Tiger that currently lives in Detroit. He grew up during segregation and even in Michigan, saw designated restrooms based on race.

An infielder, he played for the Tigers in parts of the 1972 and 1973 seasons.

But on a Saturday afternoon, comfortably seated in his chair, he was determined to participate in Neighborhoods Day for a single purpose: to support urban kids.

“What can I say,” Blessitt said, “I enjoy coming out, doing this for my city because I was born and raised here. I just want to put back into the city. I want to get the kids back into baseball.”

The ARISE Detroit! Neighborhoods Day event celebrates neighborhood and community pride through a variety of events and expressing to one another how to be a good neighbor. The event, held Saturday, Aug. 5, marked its 17th anniversary.

Blessitt participated in Obama Weekend, where the former president is set as a role model for young children. Obama Weekend was held near the Dabl’s African Bead Gallery, which has a large art piece made of broken glass and recycled materials to be viewed by neighbors or visitors. The gallery is located near Grand River near West Grand Blvd.

Obama Weekend had participants on Friday and Saturday that included a children’s parade; vendors selling clothing and shoes; booths to recruit residents to the Detroit Police Department, voting registration, information offered for mental health services and child abduction prevention.

Being a good neighbor, to Blessitt, starts with respect.

“Respect each other – when you become a neighbor, you got to respect each other,” he said. “ It’s so much different from when I came up and it’s time for us to go back to the old school. It’s time for us a whole to come together.”

**Blessed Ground Community Initiatives**

The whole community came together at the Blessed Ground Community Initiatives event. The organization is based out of the church Blessed Ground Church International Ministries and the event was held in the church parking lot at 8300 Fenkell.

Shawn Pewitt, event coordinator, organized the outdoor festivities that celebrate the area’s neighbors by providing free resources – including health screenings, recruiting for trade training, resources for justice impacted individuals and free food. Everything provided was free.

“This day is so important because we believe that we can be a hub for resources for our community that may not be able to get out and see what resources are available to them in the city of Detroit,” said Pewitt.

“We’re just really committed to our neighborhood. And that’s why we stay here and do most of our work. This is our mission field – right here!”

**Detroit Black Community Food Security Network**

If the mission field for Blessed Ground Community Initiatives is the community residents, then it is the actual crops being grown at the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network as its ground to work. The network has partnered with Neighborhoods Day under the leadership **of Executive Director Malik Yakini.**

Assistant Farm Manager of D-Town Farms Victoria Llorens said for Neighborhoods Day, the farm always hosts volunteers on weekends and chose to loop in volunteers during their normal hours to sell produce and get their hands dirty. Llorens explains the importance of Neighborhoods Day is the same message of urban farming.

The farm the location is 14027 Outer Drive W. Detroit, near the border of the City of Dearborn.

“There’s lot of urban farms throughout the city that are focused on bring food security,” she said, noting recent food shortage scares caused by the Russian-Ukraine War and the COVID-19 Pandemic.

“Having food sources right in your community creates a lot of safety, jobs and all these things for the community,” she added. “. It’s good for our neighborhood to come in and learn with us and from us.”

**Holy Ground Missionary Baptist Church**

HOLY GROUND MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

**Holy Ground Missionary Baptist Church**

Other faith-based ministries breaking ground in the community include Pastor Annie Adams of Holy Ground. located on Puritan.

Adams, an ARISE Detroit! board member, has been partnering with ARISE Detroit! for 17 years and the church has participated in Neighborhoods Day for eight years.

Adams says Neighborhoods Day is about peace and neighborly love. Holy Ground Missionary Baptist Church hosted neighbors with free food and beverages, activities and even encouragement. Adams said they are putting the “neighbor” back into neighborhoods and showing oneself to be friendly, and one will have friends.

“There’s so much going on in our world today, so we have our doors open so that people can come and say, ‘oh, I can come and stop in and feel that I have a safe place to come and be,’ and share with one another,” Adams said.

And

**Ava Jo Festival on Ferry Park**

And if someone needs a place to go, there was always space at the Mama Akua Community House, located on Ferry Park on the west side. The organization owns property as a community facility, meeting place and rental space.

The annual Ava Jo’s Neighborhood Festival & Backpack Giveaway provided live entertainment, health screenings like free eye exams for children, photobooth, bounce houses and a basketball tournament. The event is capped off with the backpack giveaway, said Ava Jo organizer, **Yusef Shakur.** Shakur said the group gave away 1,000 backpacks.

Like Adams, Shakur and his organization have been working with ARISE Detroit! for 17 years and the homes used for the organization are in the area where he grew up. For Shakur, engaging in Neighborhoods Day is part of being a good neighbor.

“To be a good neighbor is to put the ‘neighbor’ back in the hood,” he said. “Older people say ‘neighborhood’ and most of us 50 and under, we all say ‘hood,’ and ‘neighborhood’ it doesn’t even sound right. In Another faith-based ministries breaking ground in the community include Pastor Annie Adams of Holy Ground Missionary Baptist Church, located on Puritan. . Adams has been partnering with ARISE Detroit! for 17 years and the church has participated in Neighborhoods Day for eight years.

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“There’s so much going on in our world today, so we have our doors open so that people can come and say, ‘oh, I can come and stop in and feel that I have a safe place to come and be,’ and share with one another,” Adams said. that process, we don’t even realize how we decreased our ability to be good neighbors to each other. And by showing what a good neighbor is, it’s by showing what a good neighborhood is.”

**O’Hair Park Community Association**

From 8 Mile and Stahelin roads, the O’Hair Park Community Association also had a community event themed “Health is Family Wealth.” Reminiscent of a church gathering or family reunion, children rode a play train while others while others engaged with different vendors offering food, mental health services, healthy cooking demonstrations and dental services among the offerings.

The event was a collaboration between the association and Transformation Christian Church that added the health aspect to the event.

Yelena Ramautar, board secretary of O’Hair Park Community Association, is originally from New York and started with the association as a community organizer. She said being a part of the organization has shown her what it means to be a part of a community and being a good neighbor.

“When I got here, I got a chance to see how community really looks because they modelled community,” Ramautar said of the board members who have lived in the area for years. “It’s important to me to be a good neighbor, to give back to people, to be a resource (and) to be able to share information.

“One of the things that’s missing within our communities and just in the city in general, we hoard information. We think it’s ours to keep. I believe in sharing it because information should be readily available and being a good neighbor means sharing information, sharing resources and being able to help in any way that you can.”

**Cut The Crap**

Helping in any way doesn’t always have to be a grand event like the festivals or the park events. For the organization Cut the Crap, director Kathy Green teamed up with the Neighborhood Legacy Association to cut grass, trim bushes and paint steps for neighbors with only eight volunteers.

The area consists mostly of older residents that may be unable to complete their own yard work, so assisting them with property maintenance is the responsibility of the organization.

Neighborhood beautification took place on Barton Street between Livernois Avenue and Ragoon Street. Green said the area is mostly full of land bank properties or lots where properties were torn down. But getting out and cleaning up resident yards leads to others to tidy around their homes.

“We look out for each other,” said Green. “I think it’s very important to get out and learn you’re your neighbors are. With Cut the Crap we have the opportunity to see a lot of seniors. So not only are we cutting their grass, but we get to check on them.

“It’s our responsibility to make sure they have a clean environment and today, we’re on our community on our block and this is the only day we can come together to help each other.”

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