



February 25, 2009

Time banks pay off for community

Last fall, Lathrup Village resident Genevieve Skory spied a neighbor toting a large blue tarp, a rake, a leaf blower and an iPod.

"He was on his way to my house to rake the leaves," said Skory. She hadn't asked her neighbor for help, but her 16-year-old son had. In return, her son had agreed to help someone else build a Web site.

Several months ago, the Skorys joined the Lathrup Village Time Bank. It's part of a national network of people who agree to donate their time and talent. For each hour served, participants are eligible to receive an hour of services from someone else in the network.

"It's a volunteer-plus system," said Kim Hodge, who organized the group just over a year ago. With about 60 members, hers is the largest active time bank in Michigan. "If I tutor a child this winter knowing that this summer someone will be mowing my lawn, it's an added incentive to get out there and engage in the community."

'Rethink jobs'

"With so many people unemployed right now, we need to rethink jobs," said Hodge, who lost her job as a community organizer for AARP in December. "You still have the same skills you had when you were sitting behind a desk getting a paycheck. We're not tapping into what people can fully do."

For example, said Hodge, you might have worked as an accountant, but you also love to fish. Through time banking, you can teach someone how to fish and in return have someone clean out your garage. "It's a win-win situation that allows everyone from children to seniors to the homeless a chance to contribute," she said.

Time banks can be organized around demographics, geography (only Lathrup Villagers can join Hodge's time bank) or even social issues. It costs about \$50 to start one. Large banks often have paid administrators who stage events, promote the services and help people network.

Building community

As a time banker, Karen Breen did yard work for others and volunteered at a youth math program. But the beauty of the idea crystallized when one day neighbors showed up to wash her windows.

"I didn't feel guilty because I knew I would be doing something for someone else in the future," she said. "And I got to know my neighbors better."

For Skory, time banking is about building community. "I couldn't think of a more valuable lesson for my children to learn than they have a talent to add to the community. When your kid chooses getting up early on a Saturday to hang the neighbor's Christmas lights, it is hard not to be impressed."

To find out how to start a time bank, go to www.timebanks.org or contact Kim Hodge at hodgekim@sbcglobal.net or 248-424-7455. Contact **DESIREE COOPER** at dcooper@freepress.com.