

Timebank Puts Community Back Into Lathrup Village

BY: MEGAN PENNEFATHER, 6/22/2009



In the fall of 2007, Kim Hodge came to a realization.

After years as a professional community and political organizer, she had knocked on a lot of doors and connected with a lot of people in a lot of communities.

But many of her own neighbors in Lathrup Village, where she had lived for more than a decade, were virtual strangers.

"We don't live in a world that knows each other very well," says Hodge.

That sense of disconnect, coupled with a precarious economic climate, gave her an idea – one that would bring the neighborhood together and provide needed services at no cost.

The result is the Lathrup Village Timebank, a successful community system that Hodge hopes will expand to more communities throughout the state.

"It's a perfect tool for Michigan right now with all the economic troubles," says Hodge, adding that the program differs from a trade or barter system. "It's not a traditional barter system in that it's not taxable."

It works like this: Neighbors offer their time to perform tasks for other neighbors in exchange for "Timebank dollars." One Timebank dollar can be used to "purchase" one hour of service from another neighbor. So, for example, one neighbor walks another's dog and earns a Timebank dollar. That neighbor takes that dollar and "purchases" an hour of service from another neighbor, whether it's cooking a meal or mowing the lawn.

The type of services each neighbor performs varies according to his or her skill set. Hodge says one of her neighbors, a Master Gardener, helped her with her garden. Another helped her with sewing. And so on.

Richard Reeves, an artist and independent filmmaker, says he loved the Timebank idea when Hodge told him about it more than a year ago. "I thought it seemed like such a great idea to bring the community together," he says. "It seemed like it was harking back to the good old days when people knew their neighbors."

A special [Web site](#) for members lists what types of services people need done and what types of



services people are willing to do. Reeves and Hodge maintain the site and help match people and services.

The Lathrup Village Timebank is based on a nationwide model created by Edgar Kahn. Those wanting to start a Timebank system in their communities pay \$50 for the software that establishes the member Web site.

"I think it could work in any kind of community," says Reeves. "You need to have a committed group of people."

In April, the Lathrup Village Timebank earned a Community Excellence Award from the Michigan Municipal League.

"It's a cool thing everyone can do. Everyone has something to offer," says Hodge. "And this is the time we



really need to start relying on each other."

It took resident Genevieve Skory six months to warm up to the Timebank idea, even though her four children and husband were avid participants from its inception.

It seemed at first like a traditional barter system that just wouldn't be sustainable in the long term, Skory says. Then she started to watch her children's involvement with the program. Son Tylor, 18, helped a neighbor with computer problems and in turn got another neighbor to perform his usual yard chores. Her 10-year-old son Cole cooked a meal for a neighbor and 14-year-old daughter Gabriella offered her babysitting services.

"I started to understand the value to the community," Skory says. "And how relevant it is right now considering the tough economic times. I just had to take a second look."

Now she's an active participant in the Timebank, and one of its more sincere champions.

"Our neighborhood is full of people who are willing to help each other out by offering their time and talent," she says. "It really has brought our community together, and brought a little spark of hope in an otherwise scary economic time."

To learn more about how to start a Timebank in your community, contact Kim Hodge at 248-424-7455 or Hodgekim@sbcglobal.net. Also, visit www.lathrupvillagetimebank.org for more information.