

Time is money - and Lathrup group looks to save both

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By Pat Murphy, STAFF WRITER

By most accounts, Lathrup Village is a close-knit community where people know their neighbors and take pride in their homes.

If Ed Blondin and like-minded residents have their way, however, Lathrup will become even more close-knit as they barter time and services to help each other out.

"Everybody has a skill that somebody else can use," he said, after he and a dozen other residents met Sunday for what they hope was the initial meeting of what will become a local version of Timebanks - a program to facilitate people helping each other by donating services.

Timebanks programs are operative in 22 countries, according to its Web site - www.timebanks.org - in six continents. By donating time, individuals earn "time dollars" that can be used for services donated by another person.

Timebanks programs have helped build and strengthen neighborhoods in other areas, Blondin said. He and others - including Kim Hodge, who hosted an organizational meeting in her living room Sunday (Jan. 27) - think the program would work in Lathrup Village.

Hodge outlined the program to the Lathrup Village City Council last week without asking for any follow-up action. While details have to be worked out, she said, the idea is for a person, regardless of age or specialty, to donate their services in exchange for getting help in an area he or she needs.

Blondin, for example, oversees the Junior Master Gardener Program that operates during the summer at the Lathrup Village City Hall. He's like to offer his services designing flower beds. In return, he hopes to get help around his house.

"I live in this beautiful old house," Blondin said. But the three-story home, built in 1939, needs attention, he said, like refurbishing the leading on decorative windows.

His 13-year-old daughter likes the idea the timebanks concept too. "We're studying bartering in school (East Hills Middle School in Bloomfield Township)," said Madison Blondin, "and I want to try it."

She's like to baby-sit or teach fine arts to younger children. In exchange, Madison Blondin said she's like someone to paint her room. "I'm not very good at that," she said.

Tylor Skory, 16, thinks the program is a clever idea, and he's willing to donate his time to help people with their computers, although he has no idea of what he's want in exchange. "I really haven't given it much thought," he said.

Richard Reeves Jr., who has lived in Lathrup Village for 15 years, said he's willing to earn time dollars by helping people in various ways such as fixing their computers or designing floral arrangements. In exchange, he hopes to get help with spring cleanup.

Kim Hodge seems to think the possibilities are endless. One of her neighbors, she told the City Council, was offering guitar lessons.

Councilman Allen Weaks, however, privately said a local Timebank program could be helpful. "It could help to build a sense of community," he said.

Blondin said the second organizational meeting will be in the Lathrup Village City Hall, 27400 Southfield, at 6 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 10. Additional information is available at (248) 424-7455.