

Rolling Hills members donate their sweat equity

Giving - Hundreds take part in the church's "Neighbors Helping Neighbors" month

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By CORNELIA SEIGNEUR

When Dave Boehr of Wilsonville heard about the service opportunities that Rolling Hills Community Church was launching, he knew right away where he wanted to serve: in the city where he and his wife, Mary, raised their children.

On Saturday, he and 20 other church members will get their hands dirty during the annual Wilsonville Environmental Resource Keepers Day, a community clean-up day.

"This is perfect, as my daughter had a similar involvement while she was a student at Wilsonville High School," said Boehr. "It's easier to give financially, but this is a good way to give of our time."

Helping Wilsonville clean up is one of 50 service projects for which 1,000 Rolling Hills members will volunteer during this month's "Neighbors Helping Neighbors: Making an Impact Together."

"Making an Impact Together is an attempt to get our members in the community to experience service opportunities that will engage their hearts in hope that their service will be ongoing, not just during the month of May," said Bill Towne, executive pastor at Rolling Hills. "We want community service to become a part of our DNA at Rolling Hills."

The Tualatin-based church is partnering with Hands On Portland, the Start Making a Reader Today program and local schools.

Lay leader Bob Bauer of West Linn is part of the committee that began brainstorming the outreach campaign in August.

"Our goal is to become an externally focused church," Bauer said. "There were many times Christ just healed, just helped, just touched people. He didn't always preach."

Hands On Portland, an agency that connects volunteers with service projects, set up the majority of the volunteer opportunities, which include pulling ivy at local parks, helping clean up school grounds, doing yard work at a maternity home, hosting a party at a senior center, fixing old bicycles and writing letters to terminally ill children.

Andy Nelson, executive director, said he has arranged work projects for faith-based organizations before -- "with maybe 20 to 30 people, never 1,000 as Rolling Hills is doing.

"We consult with large corporations to arrange days of service, like Nike and Comcast, and this faith-based one certainly rivals the numbers we have had for corporate ones," Nelson said. He added that Rolling Hills "could serve as an inspiration for other faith-based organizations to get out into their communities."

On May 6, 35 church members trimmed bushes, mowed the lawn, cleaned garden beds, felled a holly tree and sorted donated items for babies at Madison House, a Southeast Portland maternity home.

"It meant a lot to have Rolling Hills come and help. Think about the message it sends to the girls, that they matter," said Chris Jensen, who with her husband, Dan, bought the 7,000-square-foot, 100-year-old house as a ministry to pregnant girls in crisis.

Rolling Hills member Karen Tate was able to interact with pregnant girls while sorting baby items.

"It is so wonderful that these girls have a place to go. There is such an outpouring of love from the home owners. They have hearts as big as a house," said Tate.