



Family Living

Teenage volunteers making a difference

CONTRIBUTOR STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

You may have noticed the buzz of activity centered around 4219 NE MLK Blvd the week of July 9th to July 16th. "It was an awesome week for all of us" says Herman Hawkins, pastor of Martin Luther Memorial Lutheran Church (MLMLC). "We were blessed to host an outstanding group of volunteers. They came with love in their hearts, ready to work hard with volunteers from our own congregation."

Youth and counselors, 39 altogether, assembled from various parts of the U.S.: Topeka, KS; Elk River, MN; Green Bay, WI; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Woodburn, OR; and from Portland. All are members of congregational of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) and shared a common purpose. They came as servants, ready to pitch in and make a difference during their time in Portland. Joining with staff and members of MLNLC, they fanned out over the community. From one Sunday to the next, everyone kept busy. They built shelves for transitional housing, a men's shelter and a women's home, in Northwest Portland. Some of the women also purchased clothing for the women's shelter, then inventoried and shelved supplies for the much-needed clothes closet.



Volunteers build flower/plant boxes at Alberta Simmons Plaza.

Alberta Simmons Plaza, a low-income complex for Seniors on N.E. MLK JR Blvd, was gifted with three large planter boxes. The teens built two wooden flower boxes, each ten feet long. One group of teens also loaded and transported bricks, then assembled a tiered brick planter at the Plaza. Each weekday afternoon, the volunteers presented a Vacation Bible School for children within

approximately a one-mile radius of MLMLC. By week's end nearly 50 youngsters were attending, enjoying skits, Bible stories, videos, games, and healthy snacks prepared by the young teen servants. Area children who attended received mementos such as Bibles and small gifts from their new teenage friends.

A neighborhood Block Party proved a big success, held in the MLNLC

parking lot. Those who attended were served root beer donated by Widmer's Brewery and ice cream donated by Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream. "The treats were a hit with all ages" Hawkins says. "We had music and games, plus I had a chance to speak the Good News of Jesus. People in the neighborhood responded well." On the final day, Alberta Simmons and other residents of the Plaza

welcomed the teen servants for a soul food dinner. The youth reciprocated by singing for the senior citizens. They also revisited the women's shelter and received a warm welcome. "We all were blessed by these young servants," says Pastor Hawkins. "I know they went home blessed, too, especially by the relationships they established with the children. For me, the biggest joy was having some of teens join me every day, walking

through our community, praying for each neighborhood and for the families. Meeting and sharing the Good News with so many people lifted our hearts. We also distributed over 800 fliers describing the variety of ministry programs targeted to community needs which are offered through Martin Luther Church and Lutheran Inner city Ministry. We'd love for anybody and everybody to come check us out"



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Teen birth rate lowest in 60 years

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Births to teen-agers have fallen to their lowest rate in the 60 years that statistics have kept, a government agency said Tuesday.

Births to girls ages 15 to 19 dropped last year to 49.6 per 1,000, down 3 percent from 1998 and 20 percent from 1991, according to preliminary numbers from the National Center for Health Statistics.

It was the eighth consecutive year of decline in addition to being the lowest rate since record-keeping started, the NCHS said.

Government analysts said more teen-agers than ever understand the importance of safe sex and more teens are abstaining from sex altogether.

Even the nation's booming economy has played a role, encouraging teens to take well-paying jobs and wait to have children, they said.

"Teens see there's more to do with their lives," said NCHS demographer Stephanie Ventura. "They can see there's some hope for something else besides having a child, which they're not ready to do."

The drop was particularly sharp among girls ages 15 to 17, whose rate fell 6 percent to 28.7 births per 1,000. Births fell 2 percent among 18-to-19-year-olds and 4 percent among girls ages 10 to 14, said the NCHS, a division of the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention.

The NCHS also said teen-age birth rates fell in the 1990s across racial lines. The most dramatic drop came among black teens, whose rate dropped 38 percent from 1991 to 1999.

The nation's highest teen birth rate was in 1957, roughly 96 births per 1,000. Analysts pointed out that in the 1940s and 1950s, when the statistics were first kept, people married younger because a high-school education often was sufficient to get a job and support a family.

Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala said many factors share the credit for the steady drop in

teen births.

"Parents, local communities, government and teens themselves have all been part of writing this success story," Shalala said in a statement.

The report said the Southeast leads in the proportion of teen-agers having babies. Mississippi topped the list with 19.7 percent of births in 1999 to women under 20, a rate 61 percent higher than the national figure of 12.2 percent. The regions with the lowest proportion of births to women under 20 were New England and the Midwest. Minnesota reported the lowest figure, at 6.5 percent.


NCHS also reported a drop Tuesday in births to unmarried teens, a record number of women receiving prenatal care and a rise in births by Caesarean section. The proportion of infants born at low birthweight in 1999 was 7.6 percent, unchanged from the previous year. Low-weight births have risen gradually since the mid 1980s.



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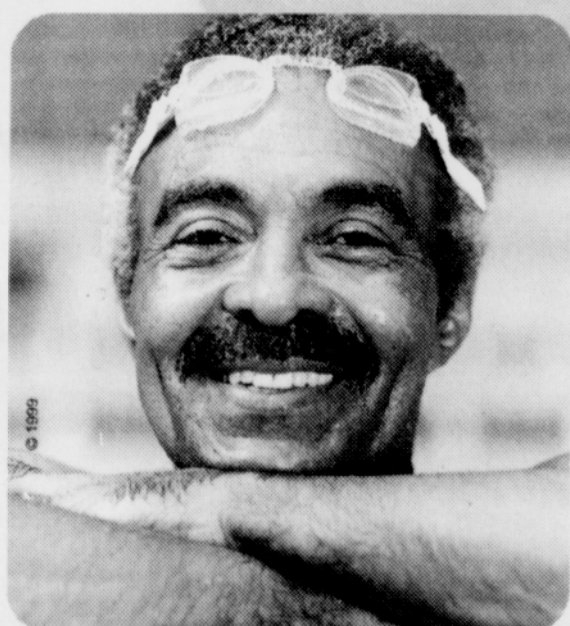
The Homowo Festival runs August 19 & 20 from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m.
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