

## **His Branches Community – Susan Morehouse**

His Branches Community has had a full year reaching out in leadership with the kindness and mercy of God to our neighbors. We take “loving our neighbors” very seriously and practically. Our goal is to be leaders in the initiative that transforms our neighborhoods through strong collaborative relationships.

We bring a lot of wholesome and fun activities to a community that is often confronted with grief and violence. It is my desire to bring fun into the lives of children who have to face some pretty adult issues in their lives. Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs, as they are termed - abuse (physical, sexual and emotional), loss of parent, lack of fathers, and one crisis following another in their lives leaves them little space to just be kids. I hope you have been enjoying the slide show that has many slides of the events we host. I will touch on the highlights:

We had a very successful Easter Egg Hunt in March and Bike Clinic in May. About 600 Eggs were hidden (and found), and about 50 bikes repaired and 15 given away. Helmets and inner tubes were supplied by your donations.

In June, we had “Game Day in the Park” - a collaboration between Arnett Block Association, School #29, City’s Rec on the Move, and the Arnett Library. About 50 new library cards were issued that day and about 300 school children had a lot of fun. They all heard about the summer reading program at the library where they had 400 kids sign up this summer.

There are more and more neighbors stepping up to help maintain the Arnett Bird and Butterfly Garden Park. We had several children from a Rwandan refugee family help us with the watering and planting. We planted over 1,000 annuals in the garden. I like seeing the sense of ownership and pride in our community this project encourages. We see less and less loitering and littering in the park.

School #29 returned in December to decorate our 15-foot Christmas tree in the park with beautiful handmade ornaments and then went next door to the library to listen to stories. Craft supplies were purchased with your donations. A neighbor installed an outlet so we could have lights on our community tree. We also had an evening of Christmas caroling, hot cocoa, and a marshmallow roast around a bonfire in the Park. It’s surprising to find that is a first experience for many adults and children.

The Arnett Block Party is becoming a great tradition in our community-one that is the highlight of many people's summer. This year we had 5 different churches participate-that is a big deal and I am sure the Lord was smiling.

One of our neighbors, Mary Dan, has voiced how we all felt about the day:

*The Arnett Block Party's organizing committee knocked it out of the park once again this year with their annual summer party on the first Saturday in August. Hundreds of neighbors from Arnett and beyond took advantage of the great weather and the chance to visit with neighbors. The best description I can give is that it was like bringing the Strong Museum of Play to Arnett Blvd. With the important difference that everyone could participate because it was all free!*

*There were connections to the natural world for urban kids: They got to ride a horse on the street, and to touch a live snake at the Zoomobile. Children and adults saw perhaps their first marionette show. I saw kids climb in and out of the Fire Safety House, learning about fire safety and at the ambulance, there were one or more kids entranced watching the dummy on the stretcher getting CPR. There was a performance by a magician and Happy the Clown making balloon animals, face painting and games, free books from the library, hot dogs and lemonade.*

*There were contests with prizes-hula hoop, jump rope and basketball free throw contests. The bike tire repair clinic filled a big need. Watching neighbors milling around, I saw that most were carrying a purple bag, which meant that they had been to Lydia's Closet at the back of the lot where they had found an item or two of clothing. As Dana Miller, our MC said, "this is the ultimate discount-the clothing was free!"*

*The event was concluded with a local gospel choir singing for us. It was a wonderful day in the neighborhood!"*

Some of you folks helped out that day! Thank you!

Your first bike, your first horseback ride, your first roasted marshmallow, your first library card, a ribbon for winning a hula hoop contest-happy memories never to be forgotten!

And now I would like to share with you about two new initiatives:

First:

Two years ago, we were called upon to provide leadership and pull together a coalition that included Rochester Police Department, Rochester City School District, Pathways to Peace, Strong Adolescent Psychiatry, church leaders and others. Our mission was to create “The Front Row”, a twenty minute antigun violence video, a much needed tool in working with at risk youth.

As you may be aware, The Front Row has had a significant impact not only in Rochester where it is shown at Rec Centers, City Schools, Boys and Girls Club, Probation and Parole, Charter schools, Hillside, youth groups and other locations; It is also being used in many major cities around the nation and some international cities. It has been shared at the White House and the UN Committee on Non-violence.

Many people have suggested that the Front Row Coalition create a sequel that encourages youth to pursue their dreams beyond high school graduation. This year the Front Row Coalition has reconvened and begun interviewing and filming for that second video, “Creating Hope”, targeted to premiere in spring 2018. This video will juxtapose at- risk youth in a place of hopelessness and despair, up against obstacles in themselves and in their environment, with adults from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds that have reached a place of success and are now giving back to their communities. Please pray for this project - we hope it will have a positive impact in Rochester and beyond.

Second:

This year we have set aside some of the funds raised at this banquet for a “Good Neighbor Fund”. This fund quietly helps neighbors in need during times of crisis.

It is from this fund that we gave jackets, gloves and hats to School #29 for kids without them.

It is from this fund that we sent flowers from our grieving community to the Brooks family funeral where they were burying the mother of eight children and her eldest

daughter, a student at Canisius College, slain by the estranged husband on Thanksgiving weekend. The cost of burying two individuals is very expensive. Family and friends had given sacrificially to help and there was nothing left for the purchase of flowers. Our flowers were the only flowers at the funeral.

Another neighbor battling cancer was in great need when she could not make it back up the stairs to her bedroom. I will read what her daughter wrote in appreciation:

*My mom was ill and could no longer navigate the stairs. It was imperative that she have a bedroom downstairs. The perfect spot was the dining room, but it had never made it through its renovation from years past. Still to be dealt with were the electrical wires below the bay window. There were safety concerns-were the wires live? Could they be made into functional outlets, which was also a necessity if the room was to be used as a bedroom? The "Good Neighbor Fund" helped to make the room a reality. Qualified electricians came and tested the wiring, they gave us a functional outlet and dismantled the other outlet to prevent a fire hazard. Because of the generosity of His Branches in our community, we were able to give my mother the space she needed and deserved.*

Note: her mother was able to receive home hospice care and passed away in November 2016 in her own home.

We are so grateful to you who, through your generosity, alleviate suffering and pain, bring comfort and encouragement and a sense of love and support to our community. It is in this fertile soil of kindness and mercy that the seeds of genuine faith can sprout and grow and that the Body of Christ can rise up united and bring Godly hope to our city.

Susan Morehouse