



Service day feeds body, soul

by Kyle Garmes



St. Barnabas Elementary School sixth-graders prepare sandwiches for people who are homeless during the school's annual All-School Service Day on Oct. 25. They also included chips and a dessert with each sandwich, and the food was donated to Pro Labore Dei—Feed My Lambs for distribution. Every grade participated in the service day, and charitable efforts were also conducted at sites in the area. (Review photo)

The cafeteria at St. Barnabas Elementary School was recently transformed into a hub of activity for charity.

As the school hosted its fifth annual All-School Service Day on Oct. 25, sixth-grader Will Walsh and his classmates were in the cafeteria making sandwiches and desserts that were donated to homeless people in south suburban Robbins.

In addition, students spread out across the South Side and the city to perform good deeds for people in need such as the hungry, the homeless, senior citizens, military personnel and student peers of different backgrounds.

As Walsh worked with his classmates, he said everyone could feel the power of good works.

"All of us helping each other out to make this faster or help others out, it made us feel good," Walsh said. "It helped us work with our friends and make a good team."



Every grade participated in a specific service project.

Before packing 400 meals, sixth-graders enjoyed a presentation from Ann DeAngelis, of Pro Labore Dei—Feed My Lambs, which is based in Tinley Park and transported the donation to Robbins.

DeAngelis told the students that poverty is prevalent in the area, and she said the sixth-graders were “on fire” in assembling the meals in such a coordinated effort.

Sixth-grader Faye Bouck said DeAngelis’ presentation was impressive.

“When she gave us her backstory on why she started this, that definitely changed a bunch of people’s point of view on this matter,” Bouck said. “It put us in a different mindset.”

St. Barnabas parent Patrick McGowan said Pro Labore Dei officials reached out for school support, and he knew right away that the service day was a perfect opportunity.

Students also wrote letters of support to the recipients of their meals.



St. Barnabas first-graders display the hearts they made for military personnel and featuring an American-flag design. Other students visited people with special needs as well as seniors throughout Chicago, including Belhaven Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, [Smith Village](#), and Mercy Circle.

DeAngelis, whose organization is currently seeking blankets and coats for a Christmas donation drive, expressed her gratitude to St. Barnabas students.

“It’s incredible,” DeAngelis said. “To know that they’re going to prep 400 lunches—I know people who are not going to have a meal tonight, and they look forward to these lunches.”

Elsewhere around the school, preschoolers made crafts for residents of Belhaven Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, 11401 S. Oakley Ave., in Morgan Park, and kindergarteners hosted a food drive for Almost Home, a non-profit in Hometown that serves the homeless.

First-graders made crafts for military personnel, and second-graders hosted tea with the special seniors in their lives.



Third-graders visited Universal School, an Islamic school in Bridgeview, where they created an art display that will be donated to Smith Village, a senior-living community in Morgan Park. Fourth-graders visited Smith Village and Mercy Circle, a senior-living community in Mt. Greenwood, to present their wax museum of Roman Catholic saints.

Fifth-graders painted pumpkins with clients at the Oak Lawn facility of Park Lawn, which provides services for people with developmental disabilities, and at Envision Unlimited, a downtown non-profit that serves people with special needs.

Seventh-graders visited Belhaven and Avantara Evergreen Park, a skilled nursing care and post-hospital rehabilitation facility, for games and conversation with residents.

Eighth-graders visited Elim Christian Services, in Crestwood, for fun activities with adults and children with special needs.

Belhaven residents and St. Barnabas students played bingo and cards, colored with crayons and even painted some residents' fingernails.

Belhaven Administrator Philip Birn said the visit benefited both residents and students.

"There's two things that bring out the youth of our residents—music and dealing with the young," Birn said. "They always express how much they love getting visits."

Birn said residents shared advice with students, and they listened to the hopes and dreams of their young visitors.

He hopes they develop long-term relationships.

"There's so much good," Birn said. "It makes their day—for both people, it makes their day."

At St. Barnabas, Walsh and Bouck were working hard to help people in need, but, according to Bouck, the effort was worth it.

"It feels really good to know that we're participating in this," Bouck said, "and knowing that we might be able to change someone's life."

Students pack lunches—400 in all—during their work in the St. Barnabas cafeteria. Ann DeAngelis, of Pro Labore Dei—Feed My Lambs, said people living without a home might not otherwise have anything to eat that night, and they appreciate the students' donation. Patrick McGowan, a St. Barnabas parent, said when Pro Labore Dei officials reached out for support, he knew the service day would be perfect.
(Review photo)

