

FEATURES



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Matt Cassidy and Will Huber put new boards over a hole in a front porch on Roslyn during the Workcamp visit in 2024.



Lizzy Rennekamp and Abby Raab use screwdrivers to dig up weeds from a driveway on Bedford.

FILE PHOTOS BY RENEE LANDUYT

Workcamp returning to GP
Community support encouraged

By Jody McVeigh
Editor

The Grosse Pointe population will see a temporary growth spurt the week of July 12, when around 400 volunteers from Kansas come to town as part of Group Mission Trips’ Workcamp program, hosted by First English Evangelical Lutheran Church.

“Back in 2024, we first sponsored Workcamp in metro Detroit,” said Renata Conger, parish education and youth ministry coordinator at First English. “Such a small, quick, random thing had such a huge impact. When I say it was little, of course, I’m joking. It was monumental.”

That visit brought 180 campers from nine churches in six states to make repairs on 24 metro Detroit houses. It went smoothly thanks to support from the community, the congregation and the Grosse Pointe Public School System, as well as local business and churches, she said.

Though volunteers are brought to town courtesy of Workcamp, the program

is a tremendous commitment of finances and time for First English members, the Rev. Sean Motley added.

“God looked at us and said, ‘Whom shall I send?’ The congregation responded with, ‘Here I am, send me,’” he said.

The work is doubling for 2026, with almost twice as many homes needing help. This year, 384 teens and 26 staff members, plus volunteers from First English, will take on repairs at 43 job sites — 41 in Detroit and two in Harper Woods. They were narrowed from an initial pool of 250.

“We had to narrow it down based on what projects teenagers could do the work on, but also on what were the most critical needs,” Conger noted. “We prioritized needs and tried to address those first.

“Each one has between two to six projects going on,” she added, “wheelchair ramps, porches, steps, railings, interior and exterior painting, drywall, landscape work. They’ll do little odd jobs, too, but those are the big



2024 Workcampers Sydney Hottovy, Cadence Whited and Chloe Dirks touch up the paint of a house on Roslyn.



The crew working at a house on Bedford in 2024 is treated to ice cream donated by supporters of Workcamp. Donations again are sought this year.

ones.”

“One house may have a crew outside that is building a ramp while another crew is inside working on drywall and painting,” Motley said.

Motley and Conger thanked GPPSS, especially the teachers and staff at Brownell Middle School, for again housing volunteers for the week.

“We’re so grateful they’re so willing to work with us,” Conger said. “It’s a weird ask for a public school system. I’ve heard from others around the country that they wanted to host a Workcamp and they raised the money for it, but couldn’t find a place to stay. So I’m grateful they’ll work with us. They’ve been so supportive.”

In addition to prayers — “for the people coming in and for the people who have needs,” Motley said — action from the community also is welcome.

“There is tremendous need in our area,” Conger said. “We could have Workcamp every week.”

“I don’t believe any

person can look around and not see a need,” Motley added. “A lot of people are struggling just to survive.”

He cited examples of an elderly person whose Social Security check covers medications, but isn’t enough to repair a leaking roof; or a neighbor who can no longer handle using steps, but also can’t afford a wheelchair-accessible ramp.

“We want to serve,” he said. “And we want them to know the love of God and to live with dignity.”

Instead of calling code enforcement on a neighbor whose lawn is overgrown, he said, “Knock on their door and ask, are you OK? Do you need help? These are tangible ways to help. I’d be happy to see people in the community respond.

“... Ideally, I’d like to

see Workcamp put out of business,” he added. “Hopefully as we do these, people will say, ‘I can do that,’ and give \$500 to help with roof damage.”

Added Conger, “This is one small thing. They’re here for the week and then gone, but our neighbors stay with us. We hope they’re inspired to help fill the need.

“Secondly, we hope they sign up,” she continued. “People on that Tuesday afternoon (July 14) are bringing popsicles to every work crew.”

Popsicles, slushies, ice cream, cookies, wrapped candy — whatever treats can be spared are welcome.

“It’s something to help them feel cared for,” Conger said, “a small

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