

All About Food - By Betsy Couthie

Another week or so and this summer's version of Breaktime will be history. What a great program for all who have played a part: staff, kids, volunteers, and a dog named Corky.



You could say it is all about food, and you would not be far off. Before Breaktime got underway in June, there was a sign-up list for ingredients to buy to get the baking started – kind of a food shower. The profit from the exceptional baked goods created from scratch and sold at the Breaktime Bakery have resupplied the pantry with ingredients. Cookies, bars, cheesecakes – all will be missed by our family and the lucky staff at the VA Outpatient Clinic, as well as friends whom we have let in on our great "secret." They have been back four times!

The thought and effort put into feeding 30 people lunch four days a week is all about food, too. I was blessed to have God supply a co-worker to serve lunch during the times that I was there. One time a Breaktimer watched me serving the kids alone, asked if I wanted help, and quickly stepped into place beside me, serving everyone else before he sat down to eat. I was so impressed by that.

It is hot and busy in the kitchen, but in the Upper Room where the windows are open to the breeze, two young women and a dog named Corky spend time with the younger kids. They focus on reading, writing, playing, and, you guessed it, food.

Each week, one of the kids in the program reserves an hour to spend with me, and I am honored to be a part of their life. We have explored the picture story, "Flotsam," and each child has handwritten the story, creating his or her own keepsake book. What a delight! At the end of the hour there may be time for a game like Bible Trivia or Jenga. I like game-playing, and here I do not have to beg someone to play!

Being a volunteer at Breaktime is straightforward: you get to spend as much or as little time as you like and as little or as much money as you like supporting a well-balanced, well-run program. And then it is over.

Last year I heard a volunteer say that serving the kids gets under your skin because once you get to know them, you want to know them more. Oswald Chambers put it like this, "I am a debtor to everyone on the face of the earth because of the Gospel of Jesus; I am free to be an absolute slave only." That is food for thought.

Ministry Wish List

The items listed below are all things that will enhance our ability to do ministry. If you are not able to purchase the item, but would like to make a donation towards it, simply make out a check to NCN and include the item description in the memo line.

- Wire shelving unit for cooling baked goods - \$100.
- Kitchen Aid stand mixer - \$300.
- Games - Connect 4, Chutes & Ladders, Battleship, Checkers, Card Games, Mancala, Jenga. - \$10-\$20 a piece.
- Room cooler/air conditioner (not a window unit) - \$400.
- Book Shelf - \$40.
- Aprons for students - \$15 a piece X 10 for \$150.
- Street Hockey Nets (2) - \$200
- Ping Pong Table - \$200

Stories



The Joy and Challenge of Growth by Eric Schalk

In our last newsletter, we announced that our summer Breaktime program was expanding. For years, Breaktime had been a six week day-camp that met from Monday through Wednesday, from 10:00 - 2:00 with field trips on Thursdays. We, as staff, loved this format because it gave us Fridays off to regroup, rest and prep for the following week. The participating kids wanted more Breaktime and asked us to expand the program for 2008. After much thought, prayer and consideration, we decided to add an additional week of programming, a week long field trip for bakery participants and an extra day of programming each week. Bye, bye Fridays, and our expectation was hello, exhaustion.

But, the summer flew by! It was hard work and yet we were energized as we saw kids grow and mature. We had over 24 kids attending this summer, 12 of which were in the bakery, working hard each day to produce some of the finest, and least expensive baked goods in town. The kids loved the expanded format and attended faithfully. It amazed me that they were always present because when I was a kid, the last thing I wanted was to have structure, education and work. I wanted freedom to do as I pleased with no strings attached. These kids looked forward to their time at Breaktime each day and couldn't wait to get in the door.

If you read my blog on the New City Neighbors' website, you know that we had great support this summer. People have adopted Breaktime students, donated money to the ministry, provided lunches for the kids, volunteered to be reading partners and faithfully purchased baked goods from our bakery store. The last week of Breaktime was capped off by an amazing lunch donated by Buffalo Wild Wings. On top of all that, McDonalds donated \$150 to provide the bakery students with lunch to and from our Tennessee trip. To say that God took care of our needs this summer would be a gross understatement.

This year's bakery produced baked goods in huge volumes. We generally filled about \$40 in orders every day and another \$40 in walk-in sales every day. After seven full weeks of business, we sold \$2,300 in product and made

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newcityneighbors



2008

Seeking to be a diverse, welcoming ministry that works with Northeast Grand Rapids neighbors to restore and develop their community.

\$1,200 in profit, far eclipsing the \$300 we made last summer. Our baked goods received such great reviews that people couldn't believe they were made by middle school students. There were some in our community who firmly believed that adults must have been making the baked goods and having the kids sell it. They were shocked when they saw our operation and witnessed those kids pouring their hearts into everything they made. There was a buzz in the community about the bakery and people are already gearing up for next year. People were thrilled to see kids doing something good, learning business skills and how to be a good employee. The community buzz encouraged the bakery students to work harder than ever and as a result they perfected some of the recipes we have struggled with for the past few years. I have heard people say that we have the best cinnamon rolls, scones and cookies in town and these are people who have eaten at other fine bakeries. It was rare for a person to show up at the bakery store just a half hour after opening and find those items available. If all that wasn't enough, the kids really proved their baking



Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough Cheesecake

skills by producing 21 cheesecakes in 3 days for a wedding reception. Two of the students were in charge of the cheesecake production and led the team in producing extraordinary cheesecakes. People at the wedding reception were astounded when they found out middle school children had made them.

While the summer was great and there were many things to celebrate, we still faced many challenges. We had two students drop out of the bakery this summer. One because he didn't like to work and one because he became distracted by his friends and girls. It is hard to watch kids with loads of potential walk away from something life changing and flirt with disaster. There were other challenges as well, including me finding time to balance Breaktime, the regular components of New City Neighbors and time for my family. While the challenges were at times great, the impact New City Neighbors had on the children in the Creston Community was well worth it.

By the time this newsletter reaches you the memories of Breaktime will begin to fade in the preparation for our school year ministries, but I want to pause to express my appreciation to everyone who supported us this summer. I know I saw many of our donors come to the bakery and experience it first hand. We're glad you could because Breaktime is a rare ministry in that it allows its donors to get a real "taste" of what you financially support. This was a special summer and we are deeply grateful to everyone who helped make Breaktime the kind of ministry that can help the Creston Community grow and change for the better.

Job Readiness

It is no secret that the economy in Michigan is hurting. Thousands of people have been displaced from their high paying jobs and forced into the unemployment line. In order to survive, many people are leaving the state for better job markets or simply taking jobs that pay less. For high school students living today, the job market demands that they be prepared.

The days are gone when employers will hire people without high school diplomas and college degrees. The large volume of qualified people allows employers to be more selective in their hiring process. In light of today's challenging job market, we are trying to help teenagers to prepare for their future careers. For the past year, we have been seeking to build on the success of the Breaktime Bakery and start a new ministry that would strategically target high school students and guide them along a path of success. In late September, we hope to bring this new ministry online. Our goal is to have this new job readiness ministry develop teenagers on multiple levels.

The first level will involve classroom instruction. Using purchased materials and some creativity, we will help students understand who they are, what they are passionate about, what it means to be a good employee, how to succeed in the workplace and how work relates to your relationship with God. We have about a year's worth of intense material that will help students learn to be valuable workplace assets.

The second level will involve partnerships with local businesses. We are currently

working to find local business leaders who will partner with us to influence the students in this ministry. Our hope is to have these business leaders help lead some classroom time but also provide environments for the students to learn first hand what it means to be an employee. This could happen through job shadowing, internships and possibly even some kind of limited employment. We desperately want students to see that they can be successful, and that they can contribute something positive to this city.

The third level of instruction will include service projects around the community. We believe that success in life cannot come without giving. By partnering with other local non-profits, and being attentive to the needs of neighbors, we will work hard to put students in situations where they can help improve their community and even learn new skills in the process.

Finally, to help ensure long term success, we are planning on developing some support groups where students will be able to come and share the joys and challenges of being an employee. We hope to use these groups to inspire students to work through issues in a positive manner and do their jobs to the glory of God.

A lot of the planning for this ministry has been accomplished but we have plenty more to do. As we march toward starting this ministry, we need prayer. We feel strongly called to this ministry and we need you to pray that God would lead us to develop it in such a way that students and the community truly feel the impact of it. As we move forward, we are extending an invitation to those of you who own a business to be a part of this ministry. Part of the success of this ministry depends on business partners. If what you've read has sparked some interest, please call us anytime. Finally, like all non-profit ministries, having funding in place is important. We are currently pursuing some grants to fund this ministry, but we also invite you to partner with us through a financial donation. Helping students prepare for employment is highly important and hopefully we can work together to impact the lives of many people.



Dessert Nights

This fall we are planning a series of Dessert Nights to help you get to know NCN better. The New City Neighbors board has agreed to host these events in their homes and at Fourth Church where our ministries take place. The Dessert Nights at Fourth will take place on Thursdays, in conjunction with our EMS ministry so that you can witness firsthand a portion of what we do.

Each Dessert Night will be no longer than ninety minutes and will feature a gourmet dessert prepared by some of our Breaktime Bakery alumni. After dessert, we will briefly present the ministries of NCN, share stories of how they've impacted our community and ask you to prayerfully consider supporting our ministries through financial gifts and volunteer opportunities.

These Dessert Nights will be casual events that will allow you to get to know us better and sample some of the desserts that our community kids have made throughout the summer. Our hope is that you will also be equipped to spread the word about what NCN is doing in the Creston Neighborhood. These Dessert Nights will be scheduled throughout the fall as our board lines up dates to host them. If you are interested in attending or bringing some friends, please call Eric Schalk today and let us know what dates you have available.



New City Neighbors is a
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