

Churches get together to help school

BY KORRINA GROM
STAFF WRITER

The picture looked grim in Grass Lake District 36, with failed education fund referendums, a sizable budget deficit and program cuts.

But a group of Antioch churches is trying to bring some brightness into the district by restoring an old school house on the district's property, ultimately giving the district more classroom space.

"I think that this kind of thing is what churches should be about -- giving back to the community," said Pastor John Newman of Antioch Evangelical Free Church.

Sharefest model

NorthBridge Church Pastor Mark Albrecht said the project began after church leaders decided they wanted to do something for the Antioch community.

"A couple of things were really close to our hearts," said Albrecht. "We really want to see our church have an impact on the community."

Albrecht and a group of four pastors and 10 church leaders visited a church in Arkansas that, along with about 100 other churches, started a Sharefest program to do various projects in their towns.

"We said, 'What can we do here?'" said Albrecht. "Then somebody mentioned there were some difficulties at Grass Lake School."

Albrecht went to Superintendent Jim Beveridge and asked what the group of churches could do to help. Beveridge told Albrecht an old school house owned by the district has been unusable for 15 years. If brought up to code, it could serve as valuable classroom space for the special education program or preschool and kindergarten classes.

"It can free up some space in the main building," said Beveridge.

Volunteers from NorthBridge, Antioch Evangelical Free, Chain of Lakes Community Bible and Christian Life Fellowship Churches started working on the building in July.

"We have a brand-new roof on it now," said Beveridge.

Albrecht said volunteers will install new windows soon, and the electrical and plumbing systems will be repaired.

He hopes to have the building ready for use this spring so the district can start using it next fall.

"It's just been a really exciting project for us," said Albrecht. "It's been a lot of fun working together on this."

Albrecht said the project will end up costing between \$50,000 to \$60,000.

Beveridge said having the work done by a construction company would have cost around \$200,000.

"Each church has been asked to put in something," said Albrecht. "We've contributed money from our own budget."

While many individuals and companies have donated money, many others have donated their time.

"We found people are very eager. At some points, we've had a hard time finding people with the right skill sets. But people have been very anxious to help," he said.

Some local companies contributed skilled members from their workforce to help with the project, Albrecht said. Others donated dumpsters, shingles and wood.

Businesses help

Additionally, three local businesses joined together to raise money for the group. Angie Childers of Angie's Italian Market and Café, Diane L. Powers of Framesake Art and SuzAnne Grube-Eames of SuzAnne's Frameshop, will hold an art show at Angie's Italian Market, 311 Depot St., on Sunday from 2 until 5 p.m. to raise money.

"This (project) has begun to generate a little momentum of 'How can we contribute to this,'" said Albrecht. "It just seems like it's brought out a real spirit of generosity from people."

Newman is enthusiastic about the project.

"Hopefully there will be more of these things to come," he said.

For information about how to donate time or money to the project, contact NorthBridge Church at (847) 838-9370.

Korrina Grom can be reached at grom@pioneerlocal.com.