

HaddonfieldPatch

Haddonfield Rotarians Help South Camden Kids

Borough Rotarians have sponsored community programs at Fellowship House for 20-plus years

By Renee Winkler on July 26, 2011 @ 5:58 am

The hearts and wallets of Haddonfield's Rotarians have patched up one more worn bit of the fabric of a South Camden neighborhood.

The influence of the social group, often tied through concurrent membership with the Haddonfield United Methodist Church, for more than two decades has helped improve the quality of life in this neighborhood.

Fellowship House in the 1700 block of Broadway, near the intersection with Ferry Avenue in Camden, now has a new, painted floor on its indoor gymnasium and improvements continue to a butterfly park adjacent to the structure.

The butterfly park transformed an overgrown lot into a play area using trees from the N.J. Tree Foundation and equipment donated by Greenlane Contractors.

The Fellowship House also has a food bank with a monthly distribution and a hot meal program that serves about 80 people. The group also distributes clothing and has a drug-addiction and counseling program.

Programs at Fellowship House also include recreational and day camp activities for children, said Rev. Bill McElwee, a retired senior pastor at Haddonfield United Methodist Church, who is the interim part-time, director of Fellowship House.

"Certainly our biggest operation here is the children's program," he said, noting that it includes an after-school and tutoring program, summer day camp, and summer visits to camps in the Poconos and at the Jersey Shore. "We have about 40 kids from the community and we're hoping to combat the learning loss that children experience over the summer vacation."

The summer program draws children up to fifth grade.



“We grew out of the Methodist Church but now we’re ecumenically supported,” he said.

Nick Nicolay, who had been director of sales for 34 years for the Tennant Company, persuaded a local distributor of the industrial and commercial paint products to donate not only paint for the gym floor, but the use of equipment to prep the floor and an automatic scrubber to keep it clean.

He said updating the floor created a better attitude among those using it. “If it looks good, and if people keep it clean, the kids will respect it and respect themselves,” he said.

It was Rev. Charles Sayre, also a retired senior minister of the church and an active Rotarian since 1953, who pointed out the beat-up condition of the floor, Nicolay said.

“It was a mess, in terrible, terrible shape,” Nicolay said. “When Charlie Sayre says he needs something, you pull out the stops. It’s hard not to be involved,” he said. “He’s a really persuasive individual.”

Sayre, a member of the Rotary Club of Haddonfield since 1965, when he arrived to fill the ministry post at the Methodist Church, spoke of how the club includes members of various professions.

“I’ve been spinning that wheel into South Camden for years. About one-third of the club members are involved in hands-on help there, from legal help to building advice.

“We took that property (next to Fellowship House) and created a park. We brought in 35 truckloads of soil,” Sayre said. Future plans are for the expansion of a parking lot on an adjacent lot.

Nicolay used his connections to his former employer and contacted Chad Angeli, a Tennant manager based in Philadelphia, and Steve Kelly from Jersey City, to pull together the flooring improvement.

Workers removed “80 percent of the bad stuff” on the 3,500 square foot surface, scrubbing it down to the base concrete and then applied paint developed for low-traffic use in an industrial gray shade.

The process took two days, Nicolay said, and three people who worked from 7 a.m. to 4 or 5 p.m.

Tennant provided the paint and Angeli the manpower. Nicolay estimated the job at \$3,000 to \$4,000, including a scrubber that is used to keep the floor clean. “If it wears out in a couple years, there’s enough material in the garage to touch it up and make it look like new,” he said.