



Richard Perkins (all foreground, from left) Kenneth Dickson and Eitel Singleton, along with other members of Main Baptist Church, help landscape the property of Mutual Ground in Aurora as part of their Father's Day project in conjunction with United Way and Ginger Creek Community Church.

BY MICHAEL R. SCHMIDT
-FOR SUN-TIMES MEDIA

Helping hands get things done

Churches, United Way join to help out Mutual Ground, Wilkinson child care center

BY LINDA GIRARDI
For Sun-Times Media

AURORA — Rich Perkins arranged a planter of pink petunias in the court yard of Mutual Ground, a safe haven for women of domestic violence and their children on the Near West Side.

"My mother and grandmother always had an eye for flowers, and my wife has me working on projects like this at home," said Perkins, a member of the Men's Ministry of Main Baptist Church of Aurora.

"Flowers bring sunshine to people's lives," the Oswego resident said.

On Saturday, area volunteers put their hands and feet to work to help their neighbors during the Fox Valley United Way's annual "Operation Helping Hands," a community

work day.

Organizers dispatched several hundred people to more than a dozen social service agencies throughout the area known for providing integral services to residents in need.

The men of Main Baptist Church decided to beautify the four-acre campus of Mutual Ground for their Father's Day project.

"Rather than receive gifts, we wanted to give one," said Henry Currie, church coordinator. About 40 church members weeded garden beds and planted flowers around the facility, built as a mansion in 1853. They also spread mulch in a children's play area.

"Most of the women are here because of the mistreatment of a man," Currie said. "We thought it was important for them to see there are men

trying to make life better for them when they look out the windows."

Deborah Collins, director of administration for the Fox Valley United Way, said the community work day is a collaborative effort with church groups and city of Aurora. "Many of these social service agencies do not have the financial resources or manpower to get these projects done," Collins said.

Pam Clemen, assistant director of volunteer services for Mutual Ground, said the Aurora Garden Club originally planted the courtyard perennial bed when the shelter moved in more than a decade ago. Last year, an Eagle Scout rejuvenated the perennial bed with roses, butterfly bushes and hosta plants.

"We have a shoestring budget and cannot afford to maintain the gardens," Clemen said.

At the Marie Wilkinson Child Development Center on Aurora's East Side, volunteers and schoolchildren from Gin-

ger Creek Community Church in Aurora were washing windows, weeding flower beds and distributing nine yards of mulch, one wheelbarrow load at a time, around the play area.

Beth Hoard of Aurora paused from the work to wipe the sweat from her brow.

"It's warm, but it's a nice day and we are doing good work here," Hoard said.

"It's worth it to help our community," 11-year old Lazarus Canaday said. The youngster worked alongside his father, Larry Canaday, and two brothers, Levar, 11 and Lawrence, 9.

"With all of the budget cuts, this work has been a tremendous help to us," said Sherry Penson, executive director of the center.

She said the school's founder, the late Marie Wilkinson, was probably smiling down on her school.

"It's important to keep the school just as beautiful on the outside as it is on the inside — that's who Miss Marie was," Penson said.

VIEW MORE PHOTOS OF VOLUNTEERS HELPING AT BEACONNEWSONLINE.COM