

Chicago Heights parks, schools team up

Agencies partner to offer students restorative practices through peace circles

By **Alexandra Kukulka**
Daily Southtown

In Chicago Heights, the Park District and Elementary District 170 have joined together to teach students who qualify about restorative practices through peace circles rather than sending them to detention or suspending them.

"We didn't want these students to become what we call part of a revolving door syndrome, meaning you get an in-school suspension or you get a detention and this is a constant. We wanted to break that cycle," said Park District Superintendent Shari Demitrowicz, a former school principal and certified restorative practice trainer. "If you have early intervention, you

have a better chance of stopping that revolving door process."

While the school district offered restorative practices for students, Superintendent Tom Amadio and Chicago Heights Middle School Principal Chris Baikauskas suggested a partnership with the Park District to expand the program and become "a springboard for future development and positive interaction," said Kenya Beach, the school district's social and emotional coordinator.

From 10-11 a.m. Saturdays, either Demitrowicz or another certified restorative practice trainer meet with 10 students, mostly eighth-graders, who are recommended by the school district.

A sixth-grade Chicago Heights

Middle School student who said he can occasionally be disruptive in class attended a January session, after Beach and the boy's parents agreed he would benefit.

"I wasn't really doing well in my behavior, so I thought if I went to the peace circle it would help. It actually helped a lot," the boy told the Daily Southtown.

The group sits in a circle in the Park District's dance room and the students discuss the self-defeating patterns in their behavior, their decision-making process and how social pressures affect that, how to resolve conflict and not place blame, identify what triggers their behaviors and build social and emotional tools, Demitrowicz said.

The goal, Demitrowicz said, is for students to talk about their conflicts and find ways to resolve

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Chicago Heights Park District Superintendent Shari Demitrowicz and Chicago Heights Elementary District 170 social and emotional coordinator Kenya Beach hailed the partnership that would teach qualifying students restorative practices. ALEXANDRA KUKULKA/DAILY SOUTHTOWN

OAK FOREST LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION



Volunteers from Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Oak Forest show off pierogi they will make to order before Easter. Members are Carolyn Fabing front row, from left, Michelle Sowa and Leni Shandou; Marietta Sullivan, back row, from left, Tania Downen, Sharon Daley, Shirley Harm and Stan Sowa.

Pierogi Squad steps up to answer call to action

Savory pastries — and friendships — created along the way

By **Melinda Moore**
Daily Southtown

For the people who gather twice a year to make thousands of pierogi at Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Oak Forest, the effort is so much more than a way to raise money.

"It's fellowship," said Tania Downen, a founder of the Pierogi Squad, which creates the savory pastries for a church fundraiser twice per year. "We have such a good time putting these together, so it's fun. That's not the only reason we do it, but it's a good reason. That's why our pierogi are filled with love."

Michelle Sowa, another founding member of the squad, said the social aspect keeps her coming back.

"I think this has brought people closer who are involved in this. We just laugh so much," she said. "It's such a great corps of people, and we have such a good time. And these are people you may have known for 10 years but haven't known anything about them. But here you learn about their family."

One member, Sowa said, "would tell us stories from her childhood and it was so fascinating."

"She got sick and hasn't been with us. She was still helping to make the one filling, but we were kind of missing her stories," she said. "It's sad that she's not able to do it anymore, but we still run things by her and let her taste test."

The group is open to people of all ages, and although it's mostly women, men also volunteer.

"We have one young woman who doesn't go to church, but her fiance is the son of one of the



The Pierogi Squad at Lutheran Church of the Resurrection in Oak Forest recently enlisted a new helper they've named Maisey, a roller they bought to make it easier to create dough circles. MELINDA MOORE/DAILY SOUTHTOWN PHOTOS

members. She comes every Saturday and has been helping out so we've had someone young. I don't think she's even 30," Sowa said, noting another helper worked with them into her 90s.

Proceeds from the pierogi sales help support the church's operating budget as well as events

such as Vacation Bible School and mission work for BEDS Plus. This year, some of the funds will be earmarked for the church's 60th anniversary celebration.

The sale, which continues until March 17 or the group meets its quota, features pierogi in six flavors: potato, meat, spinach, sauerkraut, sweet cheese and blueberry. Potato is the most popular flavor, with sauerkraut and sweet cheese running close behind.

Sowa became familiar with pierogi through her husband, whose Polish/Bohemian family had a tradition of making pierogi early in the morning each Good Friday.

His mother was in charge of the dough and filling — cheese sauerkraut and potato, Sowa said.

"She lived in a small apartment. She'd put sheets on her bed and cover them with flour," she said. "We'd spend all day making pierogi."

Sowa and her children and friends eventually took over the tradition, and a few years ago, before the pandemic, she helped bring the idea to her church.

At the outset Sowa and her husband lacked a crimper and would fill and pinch the dough with their fingers, but the church volunteers now have the process down to a science.

"When we have eight people cranking and filling on Saturdays, we can crimp out 800 pierogi," Downen said. On Tuesdays, with a smaller group, the number is more like 450 to 500.

"It's hit or miss when you're doing this. Sometimes they are more runny than others.

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Donations by home shows big boost for charities



Ted Slowik

Volunteers this week mobilized to accept donations of housewares from a major trade show at Chicago's McCormick Place Convention Center.

Tinley Park-based Together We Cope and Alsip-based Sertoma Centre are among five organizations that benefit from goods donated by vendors from The Inspired Home Show, presented by the International Housewares Association.

The pandemic forced organizers to cancel shows in 2020 and 2021. The event returned last year at about half capacity as operations began to resume after the pandemic, said Leana Salamah, a vice president with the housewares association.

"This show felt a lot more complete," she said. "A lot more people were able to participate and help us get back to full strength."

The show opened Saturday and wrapped at 3 p.m. Tuesday, when an army of volunteers flooded the floor of North America's largest convention center and began packing and removing donated items.

"They go from booth to booth," Salamah said. "They accept the product, they pack it all up, they wrap it. It's a lot of work."

This year's trade show featured

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COMMUNITY STAR Soda bread winner headed for Ireland

Chicago's Erin Nelligan said she has been to Ireland about 30 times, and she's going back again later this year for a family wedding. This time, the trip will be comped after Nelligan won the Irish Soda Bread Contest. **Page 5**

NATION & WORLD Biden to propose debt reduction plan

President Joe Biden on Thursday will propose policies aimed at trimming federal budget deficits by \$3 trillion over the next 10 years as his administration embraces the politics of debt reduction. **Page 7**

Slowik

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about 1,600 exhibitors from 120 countries and drew about 30,000 visitors, she said. It was the annual event's largest turnout since 2019, when donated items helped raise about \$100,000 for Sertoma Centre.

Sertoma Centre, 4343 W. 123rd St., Alsip, supports people with disabilities by offering life skills training, employment and a wide range of mental health services. Organizations may give donated goods to people they serve or resell them and use the proceeds to benefit their missions.

"A lot of these nonprofits have their own resale shops where they will actually sell the products to the public," Salamah said.

Together We Cope operates a thrift store and food pantry at 17010 Oak Park Ave., Tinley Park. The thrift store has been closed since a November fire damaged



Volunteers with Alsip-based Sertoma Centre gather Tuesday before collecting and packing items donated by vendors. **INTERNATIONAL HOUSEWARES ASSOCIATION**

the facility but is expected to reopen soon.

Together We Cope offers food, shelter, clothing and referrals for people temporarily experiencing homelessness and helps them regain self-sufficiency. The organization recently said in a social media post that 65 volunteers were needed to work from about noon to 8 p.m. Tuesday to transport

donated items.

"This extraordinary opportunity allows Together We Cope to provide items to our families in crisis," the organization said. "Hundreds of additional products will be sold in our resale shop."

Efforts to reach representatives of both organizations for comment Wednesday were unsuccessful.

Automated replies indicated personnel were busy handling the donated items.

The housewares market accounts for about \$30 billion in U.S. sales annually and nearly \$100 billion worldwide. The Inspired Home Show attracts International Housewares Association members who are retailers and manufactur-

ers of products. The event is not open to the general public.

"This is where they come in the first quarter of every year to identify and source products that they're going to stock and sell to consumers for the whole rest of the year," Salamah said. "These products will start to show up on shelves in the summer, the fall and all the way through the holiday season."

Vendors from all over the world display wares at hundreds of booths. Products are often shipped well in advance of the show. It could be impractical for vendors to take products home with them, so businesses developed relationships with local charities to accept items as donations.

"The industry overall is very charitable and wants to give back," Salamah said. "This stuff is heavy and it can be expensive to ship it back."

Merchandise includes kitchen gadgets, copper

pots, furnishings and decorations.

In addition to Sertoma Centre and Together We Cope, three other organizations that benefit from home show donations are The Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity Restore Chicago and Plainfield-based K9's for Veterans, an organization that provides service dogs to help military veterans affected by post-traumatic stress syndrome.

This year a K9's For Veterans client was among about 300 volunteers who helped with Tuesday's effort to move donated goods, Salamah said.

"A lot of folks who find their lives improved by the activities of these organizations then come back in and volunteer for them in order to kind of pay it forward and help other people," she said.

Ted Slowik is a columnist for the Daily Southtown.

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BRIDGE

Both vulnerable, West deals

North
 ♠ A Q 8 6 5
 ♥ 6 3 2
 ♦ A 4 3
 ♣ 8 7

West
 ♠ J 7
 ♥ A Q 9 7 5 4
 ♦ K 10 8 6
 ♣ 9

East
 ♠ K 10 4 2
 ♥ K 10 8
 ♦ 9 7 2
 ♣ 5 3 2

South
 ♠ 9 3
 ♥ J
 ♦ Q J 5
 ♣ A K Q J 10 6 4

South's bidding was a little aggressive, but the final contract was sound. Should the opening bidder, West, have the king of spades, there would be 11 easy tricks.

The defense started with the ace of hearts and a heart to the king. South ruffed and cashed the ace of clubs,

The bidding:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♥	3♣
3♥	Pass	Pass	5♣

All pass

Opening lead: Ace of ♥

queen, king. Rats! East shifted accurately to a diamond – queen, king, ace.

South could cash the ace of spades and ruff a spade high, hoping for a 3-3 split, but that would not help him. A club to dummy's eight would get him back to dummy but it would not draw the last trump. East would be able to ruff the next spade, leaving South with three losers. West, who played the seven on the first round of spades, needed to have the singleton jack or 10 remaining. The ace of spades saw West play the jack, and South led dummy's eight of spades, prepared to discard a diamond if East played low. East covered with the 10, so South ruffed high and led a club to dummy's eight. He discarded his low diamond on the six of spades as East followed helplessly. Well played!

— Bob Jones

Tribune Content Agency



A memorial filled with flowers, candles, photos and blue ribbons lies along the fence line in the 5200 block of South Spaulding Avenue for slain Chicago police Officer Andrés Mauricio Vásquez Lasso. **STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Speak Out

What's Speak Out?

Speak Out allows readers to comment on the issues of the day. Email Speak Out at speakout@southtownstar.com or call 312-222-2427. Please limit comments to 30 seconds or about 100 words and give your first name and your hometown.

The man charged in the shooting death of Chicago police Officer Andrés Mauricio Vásquez Lasso had a serious previous contact with police. In July, the 18-year-old was arrested after he ran from a stolen car that contained two guns used in a shooting. As is the policy of Cook

County's woke State's Attorney Kim Foxx, he was charged with a misdemeanor that later was dismissed. Shouldn't Foxx attend the young officer's wake and explain to his wife and child why this violent person was free to commit more crimes?
Christine, Evergreen Park

SH in Park Forest was asking why do all the people who don't live in Chicago criticize Chicago? Well, it's very simple, if Chicago sneezes the suburbs catch cold. My question is how come the people are continuously moving from Chicago into the suburbs and not the other way around? There's

a reason for that, and I feel you know the answer.
Tom, Burbank

To Tom from Garfield Ridge, you speak about the Democrats lies. Well, nothing can compare to the proved and fact-checked king of the liars and head of the Republican Party, Donald J. Trump. In fact, the entire party is just filled with nothing but lies. George Santos, anyone. I don't think he's a Democrat.
JK, Tinley Park

I get a laugh every time I read about how the Democrats keep trying anything possible to discredit Trump. Now the Justice Department wants to sue him for Jan. 6. Lol. It's amazing that the top secret documents supposedly found at Trump's home quieted down after some were found at Biden's. These

leeches are doing nothing but wasting taxpayers money on all these witch hunts. If they had anything solid on Trump he would be in jail already. Trump 2024.
Tom, Garfield Ridge

Sunday's Speak Out contained contributions from Tinley Park, Evergreen Park, Orland Park and Burbank raging about Brandon Johnson and Lori Lightfoot. Interesting enough, despite the fact that the Southtown covers the South and Southwest sides of the city, there were no contributions about politics in Chicago from city residents. So, if what goes on in the city of Chicago concerns these contributors so much, move there. Then you can vote you're angry hearts out in every election.
George, South Side



Lottery numbers

For yesterday's numbers and recent drawings, go to chicagotribune.com/lottery or use your mobile device to scan the code at left.

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- Other questions? Reach out to suburbs@tribpub.com

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Squad

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Nothing is worse than trying to crimp a runny pierogi," Sowa said.

Downen is in charge of rolling out the dough, rolling a clump a few times through a machine to get it to the right thickness. She helps cut it into circles that are then filled and crimped before being boiled, cooled, buttered, packaged by the half-dozen in containers and frozen until pickup day.

"On a Saturday, we've had as many as nine fillers," Sowa said. "It fills the table that we work around and we've even had to have someone else do the rolling too. ... We bought a more industrial-looking pasta roller that looks like it might be easier."

The fillings are made at home by four of the volunteers. "I was making three of them," Sowa said. "Now I only make two of them — cheese and meat. I handed off my spinach to someone else. Now he's making it."

Another person creates the potato and the blueberry fillings.

"Blueberry was a new one we added," Sowa said. "Every time I see Polish recipes I see blueberries. She came up with the



Carolyn Fabing and Stan Sowa team up in the church sanctuary to put labels on takeout containers for pierogi. **MELINDA MOORE/DAILY SOUTHTOWN**

recipe." The meat pierogi was inspired by Sowa's daughter, who enjoyed some at a Renaissance fair in Minnesota.

"I tried one out and looked online and came up with a Polish blend," Sowa said. She cooks pork, carrots and onions for eight hours in a crockpot. She also adds some bacon "because everything is better with bacon," then mixture gets put into a food processor so it becomes a paste.

Her daughter also came up with the spinach version to accommodate her vege-

tarian friends. That filling includes spinach, feta cheese, pistachios, garlic and onion.

After they recently ended a session with some extra dough circles, "someone took them home and wanted to make something," Sowa said.

That person was Shirley Harm.

"We're going to be experimenting with new fillings," Harm said. She's already working on a strawberry cream cheese filling and is considering making apple cinnamon and peach fillings.

Sowa said the church's

pierogi are really popular. "I keep thinking people are stockpiling them in the freezer," she said. "I had a woman last week who ordered \$130 worth of pierogi. She said 'I'm Polish and these are the best pierogi I've ever had.' I found that to be such a compliment."

She said most pierogi sold in stores don't taste nearly as good. "They are little and there's hardly any filling," Sowa said. "We put two tablespoons of filling in each so there's a good ratio of filling to noodle."

A donation of two freezers means orders can now be stored at the church instead of volunteers having to take them home. "Once they start filling up, we call people to get their orders," she said.

Then it's back to making more pierogi, and reinforcing friendships along the way.

"It's a real bonding session. And we're all characters, so it all works out." Sowa said with a laugh.

Pierogi are sold in half dozens for \$7.50. Pickup is April 1. Information is at www.resurrection-oak-forest.org or 708-687-2170.

Melinda Moore is a freelance reporter for the Daily Southtown.