

The Storm Lake Times

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Summit Church group dives in at Omaha

BY DOLORES CULLEN

When this group took off for a weekend in Omaha, it wasn't to shop, see the zoo or hear a band. What they came home with, they say they won't forget. Twelve members of Summit Church in Alta took the Omaha Urban Plunge Nov. 10-12.

Organized by former Storm Laker Michael Ross, the Urban Plunge enables church groups to experience nine inner city ministries. They go to jail, feed the homeless, sort and hand out clothes. It's a "less expensive and short" mission trip close to home, said Michael.

By getting the chance to interact with homeless people, Altan Becky Foltz said she's come back with a more compassionate view. "We were standing outside the St. Francis House Mission handing out coffee and doughnuts," she explained. She was part of a group inviting homeless men to come in for the night. "They were very respectful, very open hearted. They thanked us," said Becky. "None were rude."

"We're afraid of them, but there's no reason to be," said Becky.

Instead of losers looking for handouts, Becky's come to see homeless people as fellow humans at a low point in their lives. "Everybody experiences a low point," she believes. "They (the homeless) didn't manage to get themselves back up yet. With the help of the ministries, they will have a chance to get back on their feet."

Becky ate at a table beside homeless mothers and their chil-

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This group traveled to Omaha. Front row left to right: Donna Box, Galva; Sharon Moore, Mark Stender, Dave Stender and Karen Stender of rural Aurelia. Second row: Crystal Cook, Storm Lake; Michael Stender, Aurelia; Becky Foltz, Sally Bonnesen, Alta and Jon Ites, Newell. Back: Taria Lane, Alta. Not pictured, Pam Fazalare, Storm Lake.

POVERTY: Seeing it close up at Omaha

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dren. "They were just eking by. They eat at the mission every week."

David and Karen Stender and their sons Mark and Michael of rural Aurelia made the Urban Plunge as a family. "Country kids get to see city kids," said David. At the Hope Center Youth Program on Friday night visitors can skate alongside teens who live in an area where the number one cause of death for youth is gang violence.

David called the trip spiritually enlightening. He won't forget the people he met. One man gave up his career in chemical engineering to live and work amongst the less fortunate in an inner city neighborhood. He and his wife have 14 kids. One of his daughter's friends was murdered. Yet, people constantly came to his door for counseling with problems like chemical dependency and domestic violence. "He depended on God. He told of one miracle after another," said David.

David learned of a man who made a bar into a church. "The people who came to the bar, came to the church." Eventually they moved to another location in South Omaha.

"I wanted to see what kind of ministries are going on and the type of people who run them," said David. "Instead of playing Christianity, they live it."

Metcalf Inn owner Pam Adams of Storm Lake made the weekend excursion. "It was very humbling and enlightening. I skated at the 'hood without making a fool of myself," she laughed. "They were all very kind." She told of an animated ministry leader who sings a rap song at the skating rink. The crowd got involved and everyone's spirits were lifted.

"It puts your life in perspective," said Pam.

"We saw everything," said Jon Ites of Newell, who was part of the Alta group. "It's pretty remarkable what they've got." All the food pantries in South Omaha are interconnected, so recipients may only use the charity once per quarter, he

A total life change

Michael Ross, who used to work at Groundswell Direct in Albert City, made a



total life change a few years ago. Reading the book "Half-time" by Bob Buford convinced

him that "there is more to life than what I'm doing," he recalled.

He now lives in Omaha working for Christ for the City International, which aims to help people "transform cities by transforming lives."

Urban Plunge is just one of the ministry's programs. A majority of the organization's work is in Latin America. Michael's been to Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia, Spain and Morocco.

explained. Local companies and civic groups are generous supporters.

Urban Plunge participants are encouraged to think about how they might duplicate the good works they saw in the Omaha inner city. "We've got to start something here," said Jon. He suggested a ministry that might work alongside Upper Des Moines.

"The big thing is to keep our eyes open at home," said Becky. "It (the trip) helped me realize our lives are really rich and full."

Prayer is an essential part of the Urban Plunge. "Our devotions were not about the poor," said Michael, "but rather about discovering what your purpose is, what your passions are, what your gifts are so you can come alongside a ministry."

The group attended a church service where bags of groceries were handed out. Each one kept a prayer journal.