

# Lebanon Area MERCHANDISER

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## Living Generously in Jonestown

by Christine Techky

Earlier this year, the congregation of Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jonestown undertook a campaign to complete 40 projects

in 40 days to benefit the local community. Zion's member Jim Gill headed the campaign. Jim is the local representative of Thrivent Financial, a not-for-profit, Fortune 500 financial service organization of Christians, and he suggested to Pastor Caitlin Kurtz that his organization would donate \$250 on behalf of each of Zion's Thrivent members for every project that would do good work in the community and encourage people to "Live Generously." Zion's has a number of Thrivent members, and the church decided that the 40 days of Lent would be the ideal opportunity to rally together 40 Thrivent Action Teams from the congregation to take on community outreach programs that they were passionate about but never had the money available to pursue.

Pastor Caitlin, who began ministering at Zion's in August 2016 says, "We did this not in order to just do a project but we did this recognizing that we have been blessed in order to be a blessing to others. So often we think of how we're going to help people but we only have a limited amount of money and don't know how we're going to accomplish it but this was asking the question, if you had \$250 to do anything, not to benefit yourself, but to benefit someone else, what would you do?" She adds, "It was exciting to see the breadth



Pastor Caitlin Kurtz and Jim Gill of Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church stand next to the church's Thrivent Action Teams' "Generositree," which shows the results of the teams' accomplishments.

and depth of people's passions, and it encouraged us to dream big."

A large paper tree was erected on a wall in the church and when a project was completed, a paper blossom describing the project was attached to the branches of the tree. One of the team projects was a Garden of Grace. The garden included hyacinths, daffodils, tulips, and forsythia that adorned the church altar on Easter morning and was then delivered to a special-needs classroom at Cedar Crest Middle School, where students planted the bulbs in the school courtyard. Another team purchased 1,000 bars of wrapped soap and labels from a national hands-on outreach

organization named S.O.A.P. (Save our Adolescents from Prostitution). The team labeled each bar with the hotline number that at-risk adolescents could call for help, and the soap was placed in some local motels and hotels. Another team participated in cooking education at the Youth Advocacy Program facility in Jonestown, where troubled youth learned professional cooking techniques, and received special kitchen attire.

Other team accomplishments included Easter gifts for residents of Spang Crest nursing home, a diabetic sock challenge to benefit patients at

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### Community Generosity

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Lebanon VA Medical Center, a golf-tournament sponsorship to raise funds for the Children's Benefit Network, gift baskets for an auction to benefit the American Foundation for Children with AIDs, and a Mark Cable concert to support Penn State Children's Hospital at Hershey Medical Center. In all, 32 projects were completed by dedicated volunteers, using \$8,000 donated by Thrivent Financial, and benefitting 24 non-profit organizations. Any church

that has Thrivent members in its congregation could pursue something similar. After all, Jim says, "Just imagine what we could all do if generosity was at the center of our daily thinking."

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