



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 12, 2015

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Teens offer free home repairs to some Parma residents

PARMA, Ohio - Chuck and Renita Nohejl didn't think twice about helping North Coast Mission Connection bring more than 400 teens and adults to the Parma area for the second time. The Nohejls, youth directors at Ridgewood United Methodist Church, knew what a wonderful thing they were doing for their community when they co-sponsored the teens through the Group Cares program. The first time the group was in Parma, two years ago, the group was highly received and the results phenomenal.

Teens from across the country will spend a week in the area as part of the Group Cares Workcamp program, which allows them to volunteer their services by way of free home repairs for elderly, handicapped and low-income residents of Parma. The program is sponsored locally through the North Coast Mission Connection. The teens will provide free home repairs, including interior and exterior painting, porch and wheelchair ramp construction and weatherization. Thirty-three homes are on the list of North Coast projects this year.

"This represents about 12,000 hours of volunteer labor with a total economic impact to the community of about \$300,000," Renita Nohejl said. Added her husband, Chuck, "This service to the community would be impossible without the wonderful cooperation of the Parma Schools."

The teens and their chaperones will be housed at Parma Senior High, sleeping on classroom floors, eating in the cafeteria and enjoying evening programs in the gym.

"This is a great group of kids, and we are very thankful for the work they've chosen to do in our area," Mayor DeGeeter said. "We have a sizable senior population here who can use the help, and it's really amazing that these kids paid for this opportunity to come and be of service to others during their summer."

The Workcamp registration fees pay for the food, insurance and building materials used during the group's stay.

The idea behind the nationwide Workcamps program started in Colorado in 1977 when residents suffered from the Big Thompson River flood in which hundreds of homes were damaged or destroyed. Church youth groups of many different denominations came from across the country to help. In 1978 the program went nationwide to include other disadvantaged areas throughout the country.