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This Memorial Day picnic has a serious 'purpose'

Roland Park churches promote service projects at potluck



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Wearing a wide-brimmed hat, the Rev. Carol Cook flipped burgers for about 75 people from the Roland Park religious community Monday.

The occasion was "Picnic with a Purpose," a potluck hosted by the Interfaith Community of Roland Park to promote the service projects of area churches and synagogues while also honoring church members who were in the military.

"It's a beautiful day. We were fortunate," Cook said, as she grilled on the lawn of First Christian Church at Roland and Lake avenues. First Christian is also home to the synagogue Beit Tikvah and the churches Mount Olivet, The Gathering, and St. Andrew's.

Clergy and parishioners from those places of worship, plus the churches North Baltimore Mennonite and Roland Park Presbyterian, came to the picnic. There were games for the children and displays for the adults, promoting projects like Beit Tikvah's, Day of Service, or mitzvah day Oct. 23.

Participants will spend that day, a Sunday, doing mitzvahs, or good deeds, at 10 locations citywide. One mitzvah is to build a Habitat for Humanity house, said Carrie Wells, of Beit Tikvah, who manned a table at the picnic promoting the upcoming mitvah day.

The interfaith community also promoted its project to plant and landscape outside Abbottston Elementary School, near City College High School.

But a highlight of the afternoon was a moving tribute to all in attendance who had served in the military. About 15 had, and were asked to introduce themselves and tell what years they had served and in what branch of the armed forces.

One of the oldest was Korean War veteran Rex Rehfeld, of Homeland, who served in the Navy from 1944-46, and also in the Army from 1950-63.

Rehfeld, 85, said he later earned his law degree but became an investment counselor instead.

"It pays more," he said, chuckling.

Organizers also encouraged picnickers to write on ribbons the names of people they wanted to remember, then tie the ribbons to a clothesline that was strung between two church signs outside First Christian.

Cook said the Memorial Day picnic was a good time to link service to the country and service to the community.

And during a brief formal program, the Rev. Sharon Smith of The Gathering asked those assembled, "Can you imagine the resources of (the churches) if we work together?"

But for most picnickers the most immediate purpose of the Picnic with a Purpose was to have a good time, celebrating the holiday and getting to know members of other churches and synagogues in the area.

"It's nice to have everybody together talking about the different churches," said Holly McAslan, there with her husband, Neil, and their children, Ruby, 11, and Ian, 8.

"It's nice just to hang out a little bit and relax," said Mount Olivet's Rev. Marcus Adams. Mount Olivet sold its church in west Baltimore and now shares space at First Christian.

And the weather cooperated.

"It's a beautiful day," Cook said. "We were fortunate."