

# 'LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR'

Families enjoy free food, clothes, services at Sharefest

By FELIX SARVER  
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NEW LENOX – Susan Sterling rifled through a pile of clothes at Sharefest in New Lenox to find some items for her grandson.

Sterling, of Joliet, was one of many who came to Sharefest's main event Saturday, which offered more than free clothes, but also food, books, toys, lectures, health screenings and legal advice.

Sterling said she has low income.

"I'm just grateful the community has donated to people less fortunate," she said.

Gary Cheney, of New Lenox, founded Sharefest in 2007, and it grew from a one-day event to a series of service projects, giveaways and resource opportunities in Will County.

While families in need were finding clothes and food at the event at Spencer Crossing Intermediate School, 1711 S. Spencer Road, volunteers were performing cleaning and fixing projects.

"We got guys out there doing service projects right now throughout the community," Cheney said.

Throughout September, Sharefest and its partner organizations have run events such as Recyclepalooza, a 9/11 Patriot Day ceremony and the Job and Resource Fair. All of them led up to Saturday's main event, which helped hundreds of families.

Cheney said September is kind of a sanctified month for Sharefest, when volunteers "bring all of it together."

Sharefest also does projects throughout the year. Between October and November, Sharefest volunteers are scheduled to help with Solution to Pollution events coordinated by Helpers of Mother Earth.

According to Sharefest's website, the organization partners with more than 160 others. Some of the partners and sponsors include Trinity Services, New Life Church and Presence Saint Joseph Medical Center.

"The common link that we have is love for our neighbor," Cheney said.

Raynah Wilson, of Frankfort, was at Sharefest with her sister and great-niece. All three looked at books. Wilson said her great-niece is learning to read.

"It's so much to pick from," said Wilson, who was at Sharefest for the first time.

She said she noticed all the free services offered at the event, which she



**ABOVE:** People line up for free food Saturday from the Northern Illinois Food Bank at the annual Sharefest in New Lenox.



**LEFT:** Spelman Stewart (left) of Park Forest looks at the different types of clothing Saturday.

Photos by Larry W. Kane for Shaw Media

didn't expect.

"It's pretty cool," she said.

Orland Park-based Gwendolyn J. Sterk and the Family Law Group offered free legal services Saturday.

Michelle Anderson, the law firm's

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## SATURDAY'S SHAREFEST EVENTS

- Clothing and toy drive
- Food drive
- Collections for troops
- Free legal services
- Cache Creek Animal Rescue pets
- Raffle table
- Service projects

# Joliet D-204 action team to focus on culturally responsive education, diversity

By FELIX SARVER  
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JOLIET – An action team at Joliet Township High School District 204 will help develop plans relating to culturally responsive education and diversity among faculty and administration.

The action team will meet from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays, starting this week, at the district administrative center, 300 Caterpillar Drive, Joliet. The district has looked for parents, district staff and community members to join the team, which will develop plans as part of a new strategy that came out of a Strategic Plan Thorough Renewal event Aug. 26 and 27. Team members are required to attend all meetings scheduled. The action team kickoff took place last Tuesday.

During the Strategic Plan Thorough Renewal event, members of a strategic planning team carefully ex-

amined and revised the district's existing strategic plan, according to a district news release.

The strategic plan is a comprehensive document that identifies the district's mission, objectives, strategies, parameters and beliefs, according to the district's website. It is a living document used to improve the schools.

Each strategy contains a set of action plans with specific steps written to accomplish the district's objectives.

"It's how we operate on a day-to-day basis," said Cheryl McCarthy, the district's superintendent.

The action team members will develop plans for a new strategy, which states: "We will, in partnership with families and community, develop and implement plans to deliver a culturally responsive educational experience and expand the diversity of our faculty and administration in order to close the achievement gap," according to the district.

District officials brought in attorneys over the summer to examine the district's diversity among staff and its hiring practices, after concerns were raised by residents at previous Board of Education meetings.

McCarthy said at the time the results from the attorneys' audit could be used for strategic planning sessions in August.

The audit report presented to the board Aug. 16 showed no intentional or unintentional exclusion of minority applicants. The report also listed recommendations to improve hiring of minorities.

McCarthy said last week the action team will focus on defining the term "culturally responsive education" and how it applies to the district. She said there is a lot of research on the subject.

"They will come to that common definition of what it's going to mean for [District 204]," she said.

## Plainfield man dies, Joliet woman charged after motorcycle crash

JOLIET – A Plainfield motorcyclist died Sunday after he was involved in a crash. Jaime Mendez Jr., 36, was pronounced dead at 12:59 a.m. at the emergency room of Presence Saint Joseph Medical Center in Joliet, the Will County Coroner's Office said. Mendez was the driver of a motorcycle traveling north on Route 59 at Country Glen Court in Joliet, and was struck by another vehicle, according to the coroner's office.

Kathy A. Molitor, 58, of the 4600 block of Lalique Court in Joliet, was arrested on charges of aggravated driving under the influence, driving under the influence of alcohol and making an improper left turn, according to Joliet Chief of Police Brian Benton and Will County jail records.

An autopsy for Mendez is scheduled for Monday.

The cause and manner of death is pending police, autopsy and toxicological reports.

## 1 airlifted, Route 47 closed after motorcycle crash in rural Mazon

The Grundy County Sheriff's Office was investigating a crash Sunday evening involving multiple motorcycles in the rural Mazon area. The incident occurred at Route 47 and Sucker Road, Sheriff Kevin Callahan said.

The crash happened when two motorcyclists tried to avoid a third motorcycle that was stopped to make a turn, Callahan said in a statement. A medical helicopter was called to the scene to airlift a person who was injured in the crash, according to Callahan, and Mazon, Dwight and Morris first response agencies were on location.

Route 47 between Grand Ridge and Gardner roads was closed for much of the evening, but had reopened by about 9 p.m., according to the Sheriff's Office Facebook page.

– Anna Schier

Jaime Michielsens of New Lenox looks through the large amounts of clothing Saturday at the annual Sharefest in New Lenox.

Larry W. Kane for Shaw Media



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marketing coordinator, said it wants to give back to the community, let people know about its services and give information on legal issues.

"The biggest thing is letting them know we offer the free consultation because it can be very pricey, and at least we're here to give people a peace of mind," Anderson said.

The Sharefest event is a testament to how much people care about each other, said Lauren Rinke, a volunteer who also works for Trinity Services. She said it shows kindness to neighbors.

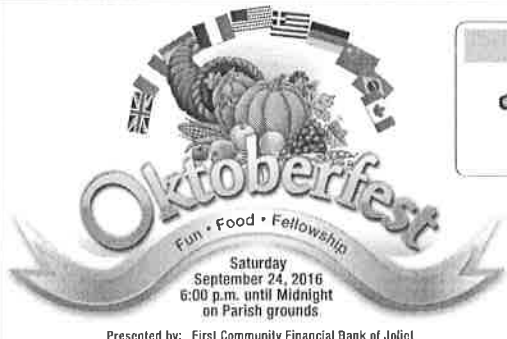
"Your neighbor could be struggling,

"Your neighbor could be struggling, you would never know. It's a private struggle. At the same time, we're all here helping people, and we're not here to judge."


**Lauren Rinke**  
Sharefest volunteer

you would never know. It's a private struggle. At the same time, we're all here helping people, and we're not here to judge," Rinke said.

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