



Nic Borger, 18, started the ball rolling for The Side Door Cafe when he decided to renovate the youth room of Titusville First Baptist Church as his Eagle Scout project. When the remodeling was complete, the church decided to open the room up as a cafe for the congregation and community members. The cafe is open on Wednesday evenings and Sundays, however, plans to extend the hours and possibly have it open for more days a week are in the works.

Eagle Scout project evolves into 'The Side Door Cafe'

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Although The Side Door Cafe at Titusville First Baptist Church took a crew of volunteers more than 600 logged hours to complete, it started with one youth group member's idea for an Eagle Scout project about two years ago.

Nic Borger, 18, decided to renovate the church's old youth room, with its "nasty shag carpet," as he put it, and turn it into a more modern, comfortable place for the younger members of the congregation.

In the fall of 2006, Nic enlisted the help of his fellow parishioners and some of his friends, including other Scouts, to begin overhauling the basement room.

Nic had decided to take on the renovation as his project because he didn't want something easy; he wanted a real challenge. But when the room's brand new wallpaper began to peel several months into remodeling, he and the other volunteers realized that they had an unexpected and unwanted challenge on their hands -- mold.

The congregation found that their church had serious drainage issues, said Pastor Brian Borger, who is Nic's uncle.

In order to keep the project moving and prevent further damage to the building, the church removed the shrubbery and trees next to the church, re-graded the area to turn away ground water, repaired the spouting, and added a dehumidification system to the basement.

Nic's plan for the room was also adjusted and commercial tile was chosen for the floor, rather than carpet in an attempt to remove any future mold sources. A commercial sealant was also applied to the walls to put a stop to the mold.

When the youth room was finally complete in about the summer of 2007, the congregation began mulling around how they could use the room to reach out to the community.

The Side Door Cafe, where all ages could share in each other's company, as well as God's word, seemed like a natural choice for the church.

Titusville First Baptist Church opened the cafe as a means to keep the members of the congregation connected to each other and provide the community with a comfortable religious setting, said Borger, who has been the church's pastor for about four and half years.

To open up the cafe, the congregation put in a brand new kitchen, renovated the downstairs restrooms and decorated the dining area with a retro theme, which was the choice of the church's young people.

Leah Luben, who serves as the church's youth leader and is also Pastor Borger's daughter, said the new cafe has really given the youth group a sense of identity, as well as something to look forward to every week.

Pastor Borger said that many people, particularly those from a younger generation, are not drawn to the more traditional church atmosphere and need a more contemporary setting.

In addition to drawing in a younger crowd, the cafe also helps connect people from different generations.

Jerry Knickerbocker of Titusville and several other members of a Bible study visit with the younger people and eat with them on Wednesday evenings in the cafe before going upstairs for their discussions.

Knickerbocker, who has been a member of the church since the early 1970s, said the cafe has helped "unify" the youth and the older groups.

"The big thing is what it [the cafe] is going to do in the future. It's just getting started," he said.

Big plans are in the works for the cafe and the lower part of the church, according to Pastor Borger. Right now, church volunteers are working on renovating the basement to expand the cafe.

The renovations to the church's basement should be completed sometime in the spring, Pastor Borger said.

The cafe, which is open to the public, is run by about a dozen church volunteers, including members of the youth group.

Currently, the cafe features coffee, tea and hot chocolate, however, it has the potential to open up into a full coffee bar, Borger said.

At this time, the cafe is open on Wednesday evenings for family night, which usually includes pizza and activities for the youth and Bible study for the adults.

On Sundays, the cafe opens at 9 a.m. with group study and then coffee, music and socializing at 10 a.m. At 11:30, a contemporary worship service is held in the cafe, led by Pastor Borger and Kathy Borger and John and Krista Godlewski.

Beginning in early March, the cafe's hours will be extended on Wednesdays, with an after school program that will lead into the regularly scheduled family night. Borger said that eventually he wants to see the cafe stay open five days a week.

The cafe's coordinators also have plans to provide live entertainment on Friday nights in the near future. As a part of the renovations to the lower part of the church, a new stage will be constructed.

The renovations will also create space for several recreational activities, including air hockey and ping pong tables, Pastor Borger said.

“Our goal is to have it [the cafe] open as a community center.”

The project was funded through two grants received from American Baptist Churches, several youth group fundraisers, and donations from the congregation and community, Pastor Borger said. The cafe's day-to-day operation is supported through donations.

For more information about The Side Door Cafe, call cafe manager Kathi Thureau at (814) 967-2354 or contact Pastor Brian Borger at 827-3531 or e-mail pastorbrian@titusvillefbc.org.

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