

# Fighting hunger, racial divide: Small Aurora grassroots effort steps up

Andre Pearson of Aurora never imagined grilling hot dogs and hamburgers might relieve hunger and help residents become neighbors in a time of racial tensions.



Pearson said, "The cookout is not only to feed people but to build community. We are about offering family fun and unity in our community."



For three hours on Wednesday, Aug. 19, Pearson presided over a charcoal grill on the front lawn of Our Savior Lutheran Church in Aurora. He was among volunteers from Operation Our Kids, an Aurora nonprofit, which sponsored the cookout free to all. In addition to sandwiches, the menu included chips and beverages.

Food isn't the only offering at the cookouts. At the Aug. 19 dinner, a woman expressing distress approached volunteers. After listening to her issues, they formed a prayer circle around her to offer comfort.

On Aurora's near west side, Our Savior partners with OOK in a drive-up cookout that serves about 200 persons on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. The church, which usually hosts Sunday worship services, a live nativity pageant and other religious events, is among community organizations that have found themselves on the front lines of hunger relief.

In partnership with Our Neighbors United and Strong, a nonprofit, OOK plans cookouts thrice weekly through mid fall. Additionally, weekly dinners are planned during winter along with cooking classes.

OOK supplemented weekly cookouts with a free family movie night Aug. 29. A double feature--"Aladdin" and "Wreck-It Ralph"--was shown on a giant inflatable screen in the church's south parking lot. Attendees sat on lawn chairs, in cars or on the pavement. Hamburgers, hot dogs, barbecue chicken, chips, candy and beverages were free before the films.

Our Savior has hosted OOK community cookouts since July 20. Wynton Johnson, an OOK volunteer, said "We are erasing the alienation that we ourselves have created. We should come together to eat."

OOK relies on donations of food and funds to purchase supplies. Volunteers are also welcome. The Aurora-based nonprofit comprises Aurora-area community leaders, activists and small-business owners.

Email [communityleaders@Gmail.com](mailto:communityleaders@Gmail.com) for more information.



PHOTO (top right): Families eat hamburgers and hot dogs in the parking lot at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Aurora before a free community movie night Aug. 22, sponsored by Operation Our Kids, an Aurora nonprofit . (Al Benson photo)

PHOTO (middle left): "Aladdin" opens a double feature in the parking lot at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Aurora in a free movie night Aug. 22 sponsored by Operation Our Kids, an Aurora nonprofit. Free snacks, beverages and books were included. (Al Benson photo)

PHOTO (bottom right): Andre Pearson of Aurora, Operation Our Kids volunteer, grills hamburgers and hot dogs Aug. 25 on the front lawn at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Aurora. (Al Benson photo)