

## Mobile Church Unit Helps Students Have Outward Focus

For Ralphie Parker in 1983's *A Christmas Story*, it was an official Red Ryder carbine-action 200-shot range model BB rifle with a compass in the stock. The dream, though, -- regardless of how passionate or factual it was presented -- was always met with the begrudging response, "You'll shoot your eye out!"

Fast forward 26 years. It's April 2009. Dr. Nate Bock, the student pastor at Ridgecrest, has just returned to Springfield from a student ministry leaders conference where another pastor told the story of how his ministry took a bread truck and made it into a portable stage.

"For awhile, I had been trying to think of a way to have a presence in the community," Bock recalls. "I wanted to find a way to take Ridgecrest into neighborhoods and to school campuses. I knew the bread truck wasn't the idea I was looking for, so I started praying for clarity."

As he traveled Republic Road on that fateful day, he moved west, past PriceCutter and its makeshift used car lot. "And there it was," he says, "the van." But not just any van. The van that caught Bock's eye was a black 1989 Ford Econoline E150.

"My original thought was the A-Team," confesses Vickie Hicks, a parent and teacher in the student ministry. "But beyond that, I was intrigued."

The van, now known as the Mobile Church Unit, or MCU, was presented to Ridgecrest's leadership team the next day. "I shared the idea of using the van to be a presence in the community, to make connections, to build relationships and to be outward focused," Bock explains. "Then I showed pictures of the van. It received a lot of laughs at first, but Hosea said, 'I like it; go for it.' I began to share the idea with people in the student ministry, and before I knew it, God provided."

And He hasn't stopped. The MCU was paid for with donations "of people who believe in the vision of being outward focused in a unique way," Bock explains. "The MCU has been known to make grown men, even big, tough guys, giggle. There is something about the first time you see what lies behind the back doors and what is packed away in the cargo area that causes such wonder and anticipation that you cannot help but giggle in excitement. Trust me, I've heard a lot of giggles."

Be it the giggle of a man or the glow from a screen, people are curious. "It's a wonderful attraction to make students want to come over and talk and hangout with us," says Joe Lamar, a senior in the student ministry. "It's a good way to interact with other students in the Springfield and surrounding areas and build relationships with them that could eventually lead them to Christ." Emilee Garrison, 8<sup>th</sup> grade, agrees. "It's such a great outreach opportunity."

In August, Bock took the MCU, along with volunteers, Poweraide and water to two local high schools. The group served numerous organizations, such as band, softball and football, as well as the coaches and directors of each. "In a two-week timeframe, we made connections with more

than 400 area students and the adults that work with them,” Bock says. “In fact, one of the coaches started attending church at Ridgecrest the following week.”

Although the student ministry provided water to sports teams two years ago, the practice had little effect. “The difference is the MCU,” he says. “We are recognizable. Students see the MCU on campus and immediately take notice and ask questions. The MCU helps us start conversations. It opens the door for us to be an influence in our community.”

Hicks has also experienced this in her professional life and as part of the Road Crew, a team of students and parents who set up/tear down, serve, start conversations, pray, cook and share Christ during MCU events. “I really think the MCU can become a presence,” she says. “It draws people in by allowing them to have an encounter with Christians and to help them become familiar with Ridgecrest – no obligation, no cost. I have talked it up at work and in the community. People think it’s brilliant.”

In addition to the outreach in August, the MCU hosted tailgate parties through October at area high schools. The manner of his students left Bock impressed. “I’ve already seen students talk about the MCU, invite others to church, talk about Christ’s love and give food to hungry people. It’s truly amazing what God is already doing through the Road Crew.”

The feeling isn’t lost on Road Crew members Kayla Whorton, freshman, and Hicks’ daughter, Hannah Hicks, also a freshman. “I like to be involved because making other people laugh and smile is what makes my day,” Hannah says. “Serving with the MCU has just been really fun and a good experience meeting people.” Whorton agrees. “It’s a ton of fun just to talk to people and serve them just because we can. I like to talk to people at the games and see how they are doing.”

If you would like more information about being part of the MCU and its events – tailgating, backyard Bible school in neighborhoods, sports camps in neighborhoods, block parties, etc. – or if you would like details of Bock’s dream of another MCU – a Ford Transit Connect – or his dream of a discipleship/missions program, please call the student ministry at 885.5232.

“We need your prayer support,” he adds. “Everywhere the MCU goes, we are razing Hell. Pray for God’s mighty right hand to be on us and the MCU. Pray for the salvation of everyone who encounters the MCU.”